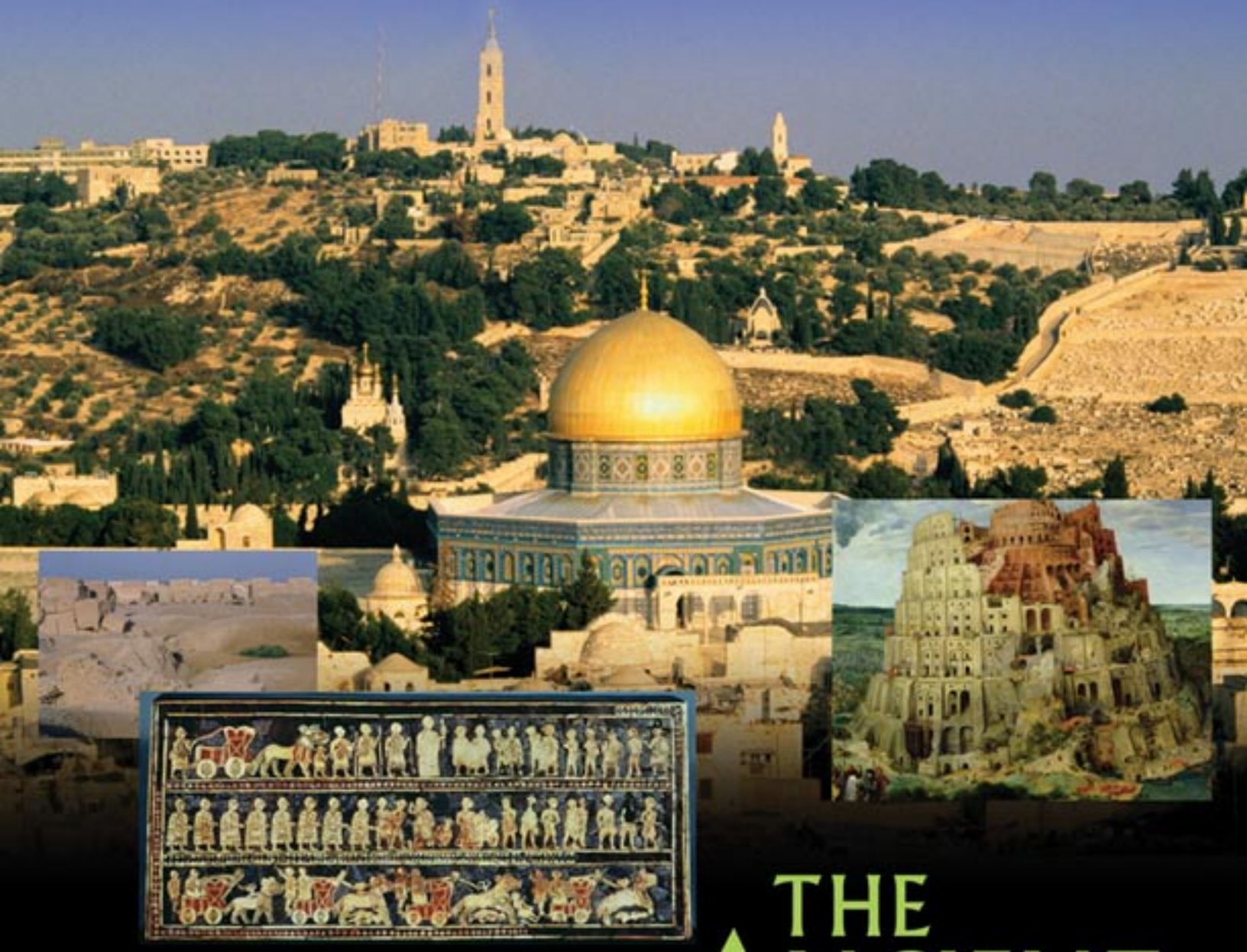
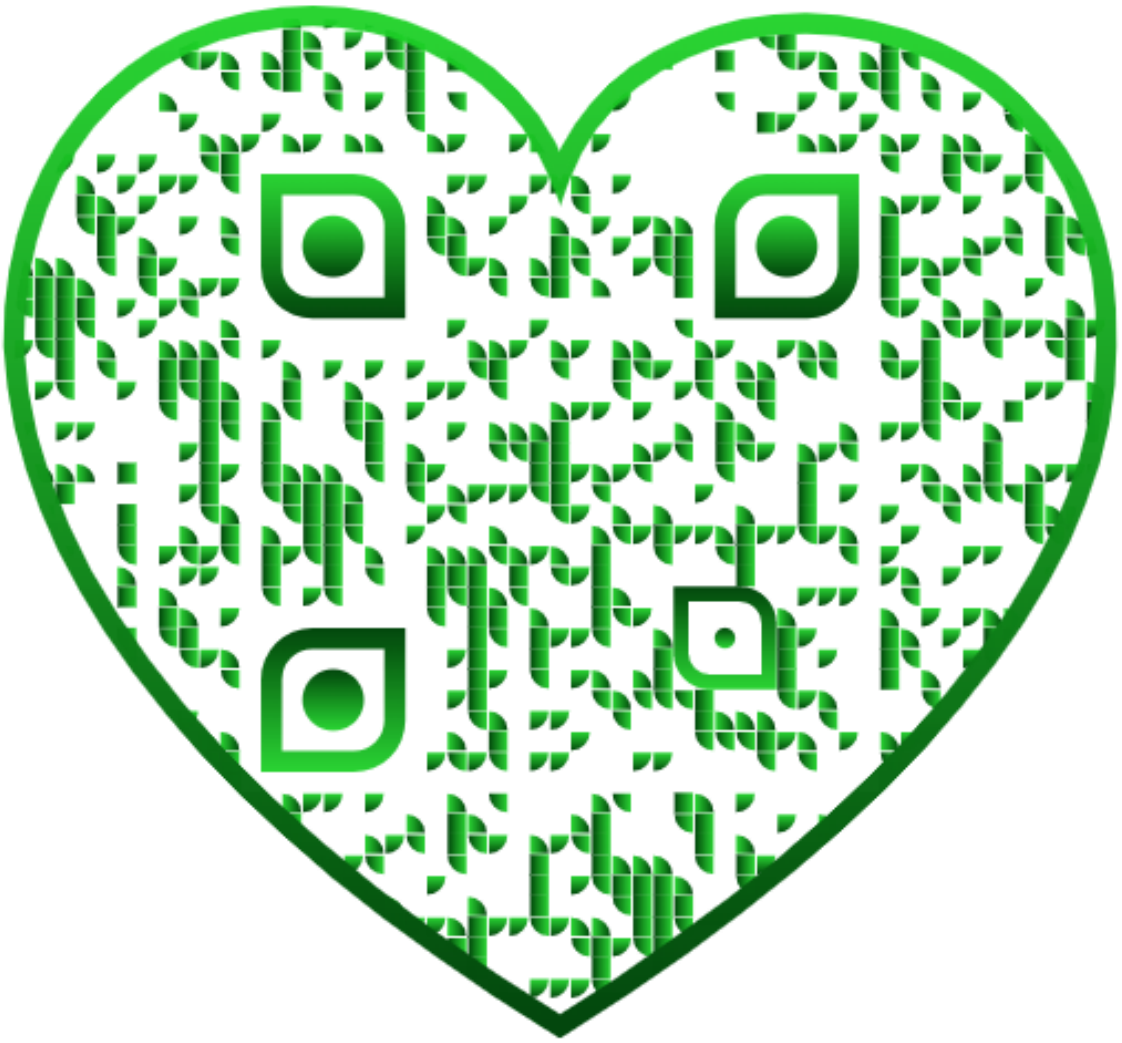
Civilizations of the Near East and Southwest Asia



The Ancient World



The Ancient World

Civilizations of the Near East and Southwest Asia

Volume 4

GENERAL EDITOR
Eric Cline, Ph.D.
The George Washington University

CONSULTING EDITOR
Sarolta Takács, Ph.D.
Rutgers University

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Preface

Studying the world's history is like being an explorer who travels across centuries to unfamiliar lands. The traveler encounters ancient cultures and civilizations and, above all, has countless opportunities to examine both what was thought to be familiar and what was completely unknown.

The history of the ancient world, much like that of the modern era, is a series of interactions played out by familiar and unfamiliar characters upon a stage of equally diverse geography. Knowing how these interactions occurred and evolved, and how, at times, they were obstructed, is crucial to both the study of the past and an understanding of the present, in terms of both progress and conflict. The five volumes of *The Ancient World: Civilizations of Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Near East and Southwest Asia,* and *Asia and the Pacific* help readers step back in time, making familiar what was unknown.

The way we interact with others today—learning a world language and exploring another culture, for example—is not very different from how people in the ancient world interacted with each other. Geographical characteristics, however, played a much more dramatic role in governing the interactions among ancient peoples than they do in interactions among modern ones.

Humans have been on the move from the beginning. Paths they have taken and other peoples they have encountered have always been functions of the geographical opportunities or hindrances they have faced. From Africa, the first place where humans lived, populations began to migrate north into Europe and throughout Asia as the glaciers of the last Ice Age receded. In the South Pacific, people seeking fertile hunting and fishing grounds sailed from one island to another centuries before open sea travel was thought possible in the West. As a result of the Ice Age, a land bridge, known as Beringia, connected Eastern Siberia, Asia, and North America, a connection that the Bering Sea now covers. Beginning around 13,000 B.C.E. or even earlier, humans called Paleo-Indians, in search of food, crossed from Asia into what is now Alaska and from there moved farther south.

While populations spread across the globe at an early time, their growth was limited by a reliance on hunting and foraging for subsistence. In order for large civilizations to develop, humans had to learn how to manipulate their environment; the cultivation of crops became a necessity for survival. The earliest evidence of crop cultivation appeared in Jericho (an oasis in the Jordan Valley) around 8,000 years ago. From there, agriculture spread in all directions, giving rise to the greatest of the early civilizations, those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. These kingdoms rose along what is known as the Fertile Crescent, a region of rivers, oases, and arable coastland that stretches in a curve north from the Persian Gulf, across the northern reaches of modern-day Iraq, and south along the Levantine coast into the Nile Delta region of northern Egypt.

Although different civilizations have been, and continue to be, separated by distance and by variation in climate and topography, not to mention differences in languages, traditions, and belief systems, some elements of one culture's intellectual history closely resemble those elements in other cultures. The creation and flood narratives of the Old Testament, for example, exist alongside similar tales in the ancient cultures of the Middle East, the Mediterranean region, and Africa. Ancient stories about the creation of the world, genealogy, agricultural practices, and morality, have been found to bear striking similarities all over the globe among groups of people who had little, if any, possibility of interacting.

With countless movements and human interactions obscured by time, distance, and varying perspectives, surveying the terrain of the ancient world may seem intimidating. As your guide, the volumes of this series provide a road map of the past. *The Ancient World* allows you to travel back in time to examine the origins of human history, how the environment shaped historical development, and how civilizations developed.

Articles are arranged alphabetically, and sidebar features expand the coverage: "Turning Points" discuss topics such as inventions that have propelled civilization forward; "Great Lives" reveal individuals whose extraordinary deeds shaped a people's history and culture; "Links in Time" connect the past to the present or one period to another; "Links to Place" draw some startling parallels in far-flung places; and "Ancient Weapons" reveal amazing early technology. May this journey offer you not only facts and data but also a deeper appreciation of the past and an understanding of its powerful connection to the present.

Sarolta A. Takács

Birthplace of Modern Civilization

Welcome to *The Ancient World: Civilizations of the Near East and Southwest Asia*. The area of Southwest Asia played host to some of the world's oldest and greatest civilizations, ranging from the Harappans of the Indus Valley, in what is now modern-day India and Pakistan, to the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Akkadians of Mesopotamia, in what is now modern-day Iraq and northern Syria. These civilizations were responsible for some of humanity's earliest and longest-lasting inventions, including the wheel, irrigation, agriculture, writing, and mathematics.

PREHISTORY

Life in Southwest Asia began long before recorded history and recordkeeping, in the era known as prehistory. The transition in the region to a modern way of life really began about 10,000 years ago, during the so-called **Neolithic Revolution**, when hunting and gathering gave way to a sedentary lifestyle with the first domestication of plants and animals. Within a few thousand years, plants such as wheat and barley were being cultivated and sheep, goats, cattle, and even dogs had been domesticated. This first took place in what is known as the Fertile Crescent, a crescent-shaped area of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. By the seventh and sixth millennia B.C.E., full-fledged villages were established at places as far north as Çatal Huyuk in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), and as far south as Jericho in the Levant (modern-day Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon).

By 3000 B.C.E., Southwest Asia was on the verge of the transition from prehistory to history, as writing was invented at approximately this time, and only with the invention of writing is the recording of history possible. The invention of writing took place just as this area began also seeing the birth of the world's first true empires—those of the Sumerians in Mesopotamia and the Harappans in the Indus Valley.

Using a **cuneiform** system of wedge-shaped symbols, the Sumerians of ancient Mesopotamia were able to begin the process of keeping accounting records for possessions such as flocks of sheep and goats. They quickly realized the utility of this system for recording all sorts of other things—myths, poems, histories, and eventually even laws and other aspects of their bureaucracy. The Harappans of the Indus Valley also began to use writing during the third millennium B.C.E. It may well have been brought to them by the Sumerians, because the two areas were in contact and were trading partners by that time.

THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

The Near East and Southwest Asia cover a very large area—from Turkey in the northwest to Iran and Afghanistan in the northwest, and from Israel and Arabia in the southwest to India in the southeast. Within this area there are a number of large rivers that, much like the Nile River in Egypt, helped to determine the very course of civilization in the region. Among these important rivers are the Indus, in what is now modern-day India and Pakistan, and the Tigris and Euphrates in what are now modern-day Iraq and northern Syria. Indeed, the ancient Greeks used the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to give the region of ancient Iraq its name. They called it Mesopotamia, which translates as "the land between the rivers."

Mesopotamia is where humans first domesticated plants and animals during the seventh millennium B.C.E. It was in this region, as well as in Egypt, that the world's first towns and villages began to appear. By 3000 B.C.E., these early settlements developed into the world's first cities, states, and empires.

A number of other geographic features also helped to determine the course of civilization in this region. Principal among these are several large bodies of water, including the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Black Sea. These waterways allowed the inhabitants of the region to trade with each other as well as with outside cultures. There are also any number of mountain ranges that either presented barriers to, or provided passageways for, ancient peoples. Among the more important of these are the Taurus and Zagros mountains of southern Turkey and northern Syria, which were the source of many natural resources, including timber and metal ores.

EARLY PEOPLES AND CIVILIZATIONS

By the third millennium B.C.E., the great Harappan civilization in the Indus Valley had arisen, with its large and important cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. At the same time, or perhaps even a bit earlier, in the region of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia, we find the Sumerians rising to prominence. They were followed by the Akkadians and then the Babylonians in the later third and early second millennia B.C.E., respectively. During the middle and later years of the second millennium B.C.E. (ca. 1700–1200 B.C.E.), the Hittites of Anatolia and the Canaanites of the Levant developed into prominent cultures that frequently came into contact with the Egyptian empire.

The late second and early first millennia B.C.E. witnessed the rise of fascinating cultures and inventions in Southwest Asia. These included civilizations of the Israelites, who introduced **monotheism** (the belief in a single god); the Phoenicians, who developed the alphabet; the Lydians, who manufactured the world's first coins; the Assyrians; the Persians; and the Scythians. Beginning in the first millennium C.E., the Byzantine Empire flowered in what are now modern Turkey and Greece, and Islam spread across much of what is now the modern Middle East and as far west as modern-day Spain. Other major religions that were born in the region between the second millennium B.C.E. and the first millennium C.E. include Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity.

EXCHANGE AND ENCOUNTER

The various regions of Southwest Asia were in almost constant contact and communication with each other. Already during the third millennium B.C.E., the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley were in direct contact, trading objects and ideas back and forth over the centuries. Mesopotamia was also in contact with pre-dynastic Egypt, perhaps as early as the fourth millennium B.C.E. It is currently a matter of debate as to which civilization invented writing first—the Sumerians, who used cuneiform in about 3700 B.C.E., or the Egyptians, who in about 3400 B.C.E. wrote using **hieroglyphics**.

One of the most interesting examples of exchange and encounter involved the Assyrians from early-second-millennium B.C.E. Mesopotamia. Assyrian merchants traveled all the way to Anatolia each year with huge caravans of donkeys, trading tin and **textiles** for silver and other goods. They would spend part of the year in Mesopotamia, part of the year in Anatolia, and the rest of the time traveling between the two regions, as indicated by texts found by **archeologists** at a site called Kültelpe Kanesh in modern Turkey.

Conquest

Encounters between these various cultures and civilizations often were marked by conflict. Some of the most famous wars were between the Hittites of Anatolia and the Egyptians during the second millennium B.C.E. over territory in Canaan and northern Syria. Wars of conquest were waged by the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Chaldeans during the third and second millennia B.C.E., with each group's succeeding its defeated rivals. The Akkadians displaced the Sumerians, the Babylonians displaced the Akkadians, the Chaldeans displaced the Babylonians, and so on, in a constant cycle of conquest.

In many instances, the new conquerors adopted or adapted the culture of the people that they had just vanquished. Thus, inventions such as mythology and literature passed down from the Sumerians to the Akkadians, Babylonians, and ensuing civilizations. Each culture added to the mix as well, passing down a wealth of information to the Canaanites and Israelites. This knowledge was later picked up by the Greeks and Romans, who bequeathed it as part of their legacy to the modern world.

Trade

Long-distance trade was conducted both overland and by sea. At several points in history, particularly during the second millennium B.C.E., entire classes of merchants specialized in international trade. At the same time, diplomats serving as messengers and intermediaries between royal courts traveled from Anatolia to Egypt or from Egypt to Mesopotamia. Frequently, the merchants and diplomats were

one and the same, for merchants could just as easily carry messages and diplomats could just as easily bring textiles and other goods with them, and both could convey gifts from one monarch to another.

Perhaps the most successful and noteworthy merchants were the seafaring Phoenicians of the late second and early first millennia B.C.E. These daring sailors made their way as far west as Spain and Gibraltar, establishing cities and colonies in places as far away as Carthage in North Africa.

TRANSITION

The Islamic Arab empire that arose in the seventh century C.E. was the last great civilization of ancient Southwest Asia. In little more than a century, Islam grew from a tiny religious sect in central Arabia to a powerful military and social force that spread across the ancient world. By C.E. 750, the caliphate, or **secular** Muslim realm, stretched from western India to the Mediterranean, across Arabia and North Africa and into Iberia (modern-day Spain and Portugal). The Islamic empire was vast, rich, militarily powerful, and highly educated. Europe, by comparison, was poor, backward, and underdeveloped.

The Turks and Mongols, nomadic raiders from Central Asia, brought an end to Arab control over Southwest Asia, beginning in the eleventh century C.E. In the late 1070s, the Seljuk Turks invaded Anatolia, establishing a Turkish state there. In 1218, the Mongolian leader Genghis Khan (ca. C.E. 1162–1227) overran Persia (modern-day Iran), eventually wresting all of Southwest Asia from Arab rule. Both the Turks and the Mongols, however, adopted the Islamic faith of their defeated foes. The Ottoman Turks overthrew the Seljuks in C.E. 1299 and expanded the Turkish realm to include most of the lands conquered by Genghis Khan. Ottoman armies twice advanced into Europe as far as Vienna, Austria, before being repulsed by Christian forces.

The Ottomans ruled over Southwest Asia until the early twentieth century C.E., although their power and the extent of their territorial control rose and fell at various times. By the nineteenth century, the Ottoman state had grown so weakened and corrupt that it was known as "the sick man of Europe." By this time, most people had long forgotten about the powerful civilizations that once existed in Southwest Asia. The Ottomans themselves showed little interest in the ancient history of the region. In Europe, Babylonia and Phoenicia were known mainly because they were featured in Bible stories. Significant early cultures, such as those of Sumerians, Akkadians, and Hittites, were for the most part little-known academic footnotes.

LINKS TO THE PRESENT

In the nineteenth century C.E., European interest in the ancient civilizations of Southwest Asia was stirred by discoveries made at sites like Ur, Uruk, and Nippur in Iraq, and, in the Indus Valley, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Sculptures, jewelry, carvings, grave goods, and inscribed clay tablets revealed the existence of advanced ancient cultures and scholars vied to unlock their millennia-old secrets. European explorers rushed to discover, and bring home to their museums, the best preserved and most famous antiquities that they could. The long-lost remains of the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Harappans began to emerge from the sand and dirt of Southwest Asia.

When the amateur British **linguist** Henry Rawlinson deciphered and translated the so-called Behistun **inscription** in 1838, cuneiform became more than mere decorative wedges impressed on clay or carved on stone. The ability to read the writings of the Persians, Elamites, and earlier peoples of Mesopotamia brought the history of the Near East and Southwest Asia to a fascinated European audience. This fascination has lasted to the present day and has now spread to an international audience.

The colonizing movements of the nineteenth century C.E. and the wars and politics of the twentieth century brought significant changes to the region, including the creation of modern nations such as Iraq, India, Pakistan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Some of these political divisions were quite artificial, imposing man-made boundaries on areas where such boundaries had previously been

created only by geography—rivers, mountains, and valleys—and boosting certain local tribes and families to prominence, often at the expense of others. Nevertheless, the antiquity of the region and the long stretch of continuous civilizations which have inhabited Southwest Asia remain as reminders of the longevity of human habitation in this area. As the birthplace of agriculture, urban living, writing, the wheel, and other vital underpinnings of the modern world, it may truly be said that this region gave rise to civilization itself.

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Eric Cline, Ph.D.
General Editor

Map of the Ancient Near East and Southwest Asia

ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND SOUTHWEST ASIA BEFORE C.E. 1500

Historians and archeologists often refer to ancient Southwest Asia as the "cradle of civilization" because it was the site of many of the world's earliest settled societies, including the Sumerians, Akkadians, and Babylonians. Each subsequent culture borrowed freely from its predecessors, creating elements of a common Mesopotamian civilization, many of which still survive. The region was also the birthplace of the world's major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

A

Agriculture

Archeological evidence suggests that humans first domesticated plants and animals and began to practice settled agriculture in Southwest Asia. Until about the seventh millennium B.C.E., the people who inhabited the region were hunter-gatherers who survived by following and hunting roving herds of animals and supplemented their diet with grain and plants they found growing wild.

The region was settled around 9000 B.C.E. and, over the next 2,000 years, people began to experiment with gathering seeds, drying them, and planting them. By the seventh millennium B.C.E., these efforts resulted in the domestication of a variety of plants and the beginnings of settled agriculture.

At about the same time humans were learning to domesticate crops, they also began to domesticate certain animals. Sheep and goats were the first to be domesticated, because of their ability to move easily over the rocky terrain of the region and to eat the wild tough grasses that grow there. By the fifth millennium B.C.E., pigs and an early ancestor of today's cows also were being raised. Eventually, larger animals such as oxen were domesticated and used for heavier agricultural labor including pulling plows. The domestication of animals thus not only accompanied the development of agriculture, but also helped to facilitate it.

ENVIRONMENT

Early farmers in Southwest Asia had to overcome a series of environmental challenges to establish successful agricultural communities. In the Fertile Crescent, where the first agricultural settlements arose, rainfall is restricted largely to the months of December to April. This limits the growing season, which means that generally only one crop can be produced each year. Most of the water available for farming is supplied by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which flow from the Taurus Mountains of Anatolia (present-day Turkey) to the Persian Gulf. Melting spring snows in the mountains feed the rivers, but the supply of water they provide is irregular. Over any seven-year period, the region averages at least one year of drought and one year of significant flooding.

Other environmental issues that farmers face in the region include thin and rocky soil, and extremes of temperature. The area between the Tigris and Euphrates contains few trees, the roots of which would serve to anchor the soil and prevent the erosion and loss of topsoil caused by blowing winds. Those same winds rob moisture from the already rocky soil. These difficulties are compounded by

TURNING POINT

Founder Crops

Sedentary farming developed in the Fertile Crescent largely because of the presence of two hardy forms of wheat native to the region: einkorn and emmer. Hunting and gathering societies found that the wild forms of these basic crops, called founder crops, could be used in a variety of ways. The kernels were ground into flour, which was used to make gruel and bread. The grains were also fermented into an early form of beer, which would have been healthier to drink than water, which contained both bacteria and other contaminants.

Einkhorn and emmer were among the first plants to be domesticated, and they were the focus of early agricultural efforts. Although these plants constituted a bland diet, they contained sufficient calories and nutrition to support the group and improve the population's general health. Over time, farmers learned to domesticate other basic crops, called founder crops, including barley, beans, lentils, and peas. This more diversified diet provided a wider variety of nutrients and minerals, which enhanced the population's potential ability to fight off malnutrition, related diseases, and death from these factors.

temperatures that range from below freezing to 112° Fahrenheit (45° Celsius).

IRRIGATION

In order to make intensive agricultural production possible, humans in the region needed to solve the problem of reliable water resources. That solution took the form of irrigation, which developed in Mesopotamia by about 5400 B.C.E., and in the Indus River valley by 2600 B.C.E. This marked one of the most significant early stages in the **history of science and technology**.

Early irrigation systems were rudimentary, consisting of hand-dug channels leading from a river to nearby fields. The earthen irrigation ditches were covered with baked clay pipes to prevent loss of precious water into the surrounding soil. Where pipes met, they were connected with bitumen, a thick form of crude oil used as a kind of tar to seal connections and prevent leaks.

To control the flow of water, rocks were used as gates to open or close channels, moving water into the fields when needed and blocking it when the crops were sufficiently watered. Over time, farmers fashioned metal gates to replace the rocks, eventually developing mechanically operated systems to open and close the channels as needed.

These irrigation systems continued to evolve, becoming more sophisticated and making increasingly greater use of technical innovations. In the seventh century B.C.E., the Persians created the *qanat* to move water with little loss or evaporation. The qanat consists of several vertical shafts cut into the soil and connected by a horizontal tunnel cut at a slight downward angle away from the water source. This allows gravity to do the work of moving the water. A 2,700-year-old qanat is still in use today in the Iranian city of Gonabad. It is almost 1,200 feet (360 m) deep and 27 miles (43 km) long.

Another invention that significantly eased the problem of irrigation was the *shaduf*. This device consists of a frame made of two upright posts on which a horizontal wooden pole is suspended. The long end of the horizontal pole holds a bucket that hangs over the river; the other end holds a counterweight. After the bucket is lowered into the river, the counterweight lifts the water-filled bucket. The pole is then swung around and the water from the bucket water is emptied into a canal, from which it flows into the field.

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

The development of settled agriculture led not only to changes in diet and the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle, but also to significant changes in human social organization. **Archeologists** and anthropologists have discovered a clear **cause-and-effect relationship** between the rise of agriculture and

This three-foot-tall alabaster vase from the ancient Mesopotamian city-state of Uruk contains some of the world's first narrative pictures. The five tiers of carvings depict water, grain, sheep, priests, and rulers bearing offerings—the basic components of the ancient agricultural societies of the Near East and Southwest Asia. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

the evolution of more complex social and cultural institutions.

Gender Roles

One way in which agriculture affected human **social history** and **cultural history** was by changing the roles assumed by men and women in farming communities. Prior to adopting a sedentary lifestyle, women were responsible for gathering the wild grains, grasses, and other plants that formed a large part of the hunter-gatherer diet. As a result, they also took the lead in the early domestication of plants. Men, by contrast, were primarily occupied with hunting.

With the advent of settled agriculture and the domestication of animals, hunting lost its importance for group survival. Male group members thus turned the energies they had once invested in the hunt to the task of farming, taking control of agricultural production. Because of the central role that agriculture played in the growth and survival of settled farming communities, male control over farming translated into control over daily decision making. The largely **egalitarian** social organization of hunting-gathering groups gave way to societies in which men assumed a much more dominant role.

Social Stratification

Over time, farmers became increasingly more efficient, producing greater amounts of food with less labor. Agricultural communities found that fewer people were needed to grow the crops required to feed the population, which freed some members of society to take on different tasks. Some learned to make pottery to store the food, while others perfected skills such as weaving and metalworking. The goods produced by these early **artisans** were used not only locally but also were eventually traded with other communities. A merchant class arose that did not produce goods themselves, but facilitated the spread of goods from one community to another. Agriculture thus also led to a revolution in human **economic history**.

While the small size (30 or fewer individuals) of hunting-gathering communities precluded the need for formal government, the larger size and increasing social complexity of settled communities demanded some form of central social organization. In response to this need, agricultural communities developed a more **hierarchical** social structure that featured a ruling class to coordinate and direct the efforts of the society. In fact, agriculture can be credited with creating the conditions that led to the rise of the world's first true civilizations. The evolution of human **political history** began with the move from the decentralized leadership typical of hunter-gatherer societies to the **stratification** that characterizes sedentary societies.

Religious Belief and Practice

The emergence of the earliest civilizations in Mesopotamia (the region bounded by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers) went hand-in-hand with the rise of the first organized religions. These belief systems centered on the worship of deities identified with the forces of nature—sun, rain, and wind—that dictated the success or failure of agricultural efforts and with heavenly bodies such as the moon. The residents of early Mesopotamian **city-states** believed that they and the lands they controlled were overseen by these deities. Each had a patron god and a **pantheon** of local minor deities.

In each city-state, a priestly class emerged that was responsible for properly honoring the gods, which they believed ensured the prosperity of the community. The priesthood managed agricultural lands, collected taxes in the form of crops and animals, and assigned human and financial resources for building projects. Farmers did not own the land they worked, but rented it from the priesthood.

Religious rituals practiced by the priests were considered vital to ward off bad weather, pests, and other natural occurrences controlled by the gods. Good harvests were secured by offerings of grain and wine to the earth goddess and to the gods of sun, wind, and rain. At both planting and harvest times, symbolic fertility rituals would take place that often included ritual intercourse between farmers and temple prostitutes, representing the interaction of the farmer and the earth goddess. In a region with such a variable environment, marked by extremes of temperature and rainfall, the good will of supernatural forces was considered essential for survival.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The most basic change wrought by the development of sedentary agriculture was an increase in food production. This led in turn to an increase in population and a general improvement in people's health, which increased their ability to fight off disease, resulting in the possibility of living longer and healthier lives.

Agriculture also spurred technological innovation as new tools were developed to make farming more productive. In the sixth millennium B.C.E., the plow was invented. At first, this tool consisted of nothing more than a forked stick used to break up the soil. By the fourth millennium B.C.E., the need for stronger implements led to the discovery of smelting—the extraction of metal from ore. Copper and later bronze was fashioned into blades for hoes and sickles and used to create an improved plow. These tools allowed farmers in Mesopotamia to work the different kinds of soils that existed in the region, enabling them to produce more food in each growing season. They were also the precursors of the first metal weapons.

Settled agriculture also promoted the development of diverse cultures in Southwest Asia. Groups of people who lived together shared unique sets of values and patterns of behavior that characterized them and separated them from other groups. Each culture had its own religious beliefs, artistic decorations, styles of pottery, and forms of social organization. As civilization emerged in Mesopotamia, rulers created sophisticated law codes, architects undertook massive building projects, and artisans, writers, and poets produced the world's first artistic and literary works. In all of these ways, agriculture formed the indispensable foundation for the rise of human civilization.

See also: Anatolia; Babylonia; Fertile Crescent; Hammurabi; Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro; Indus River; Mesopotamia; Persia; Sumer.

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Anatolia

A large peninsula that includes most of present-day Turkey and that was the site of several prominent ancient cultures. Also known as Asia Minor, Anatolia is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the Aegean Sea to the west, and the Black Sea to the north. It is separated from the European continent to the northwest by two narrow straits, the Bosporus and the Hellespont. Between the two straits lies the Sea of Marmara; together, these bodies of water provide a water passage between the Aegean and Black seas.

The rocky Anatolian Plateau, which dominates the center of the peninsula, is surrounded by mountains and foothills that affect weather patterns and serve to limit rainfall in the region. Two major mountain ranges stretch across Anatolia: the Pontus Mountains, which border the Black Sea, and the Taurus Mountains, in the south along the Mediterranean coast. The highest peaks rise from about 5,000 to about 13,000 feet (1,500 to 4,000 m). The region has many rivers fed by the melting snows of the Pontus and Taurus mountains. The most important of these are the Halys, the longest in Anatolia, and the Euphrates and Tigris, which flow southward into Mesopotamia and empty into the Persian Gulf.

Evidence of prehistoric settlements in Anatolia goes back to the **Neolithic Period**. Çatal Huyuk, which dates to about 7500 B.C.E., is the largest such settlement found to date. Around 3000 B.C.E., independent **city-states**, such as Troy (located on the Aegean coast) were first established in the region. Early in the second millennium B.C.E., merchants from the Assyrian empire of northern Mesopotamia established trading settlements that brought Anatolians into the wider political and economic life of the Fertile Crescent.

Around 1750 B.C.E., the Hittites, a loose confederation of Indo-European peoples, invaded Anatolia and made it the center of their new kingdom. By 1200 B.C.E., however, political fragmentation weakened the Hittites and left them vulnerable to invasion from other groups in the Aegean region. The two most important groups of these invaders were the Persians, who conquered the area in 546 B.C.E., and the Macedonians under Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), who defeated the Persians and brought the region into the **Hellenistic** world. After Alexander's death, Anatolia splintered into several kingdoms that were incorporated into the Roman Republic by the first century B.C.E.

Anatolia remained under Roman control for the next 1,500 years, first as part of the Roman Empire (27 B.C.E.–C.E. 476) and then as the center of the Byzantine Empire. By the fourteenth century C.E., the Islamic Ottoman Empire expanded into Anatolia and, by 1400, Byzantine control was limited to the city of Constantinople, which fell to Ottoman forces in 1453.

See also: Assyria; Çatal Huyuk; Hittites; Persia.

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Arameans

Nomadic **Semitic** people who lived in scattered groups throughout Mesopotamia and Syria. Although the Arameans were never a major power in the region, by the sixth century B.C.E., their language had been adopted as the common language of governance and commerce throughout the Persian Empire. The influence of the Aramaic language in the region continued under Roman rule in the first several centuries C.E.

The Arameans, whose origins are not recorded, migrated into the region as nomadic herders between 1500 and 1200 B.C.E. The first evidence of their presence there comes from an **inscription** dated to the reign of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (r. ca. 1115–1076 B.C.E.). While the Assyrians were among the strongest powers in the region, they did not exercise total control and the Arameans were able to carve out small territories for themselves.

By the tenth century B.C.E., the Arameans took over several Assyrian strongholds, including the important trading cities of Harran (in modern-day Turkey), and Damascus (in present-day Syria). In Damascus, the Arameans built a system, similar to later Roman aqueducts, by which water was brought via stone channels to the city from sources in the countryside and mountains.

One of the Arameans' most significant contributions to civilization was the development of a phonetic alphabet based on the earlier Phoenician alphabet. By the eighth century B.C.E., the Aramean language and writing system were being used widely in ancient Southwest Asia. The Persians adopted the Aramaic language around 500 B.C.E. as a common tongue to help unify their multilingual empire. Other Semitic-speaking peoples of the region, including the Hebrews, adopted the Aramaic alphabet and language for daily use. The Hebrews used Aramaic to write portions of the Hebrew Bible, or scriptures. Many early Christians also spoke Aramaic.

See also: Archeological Discoveries; Assyria; Christianity; Culture and Traditions; Jews and Judaism; Language and Writing; Persia; Technology and Inventions.

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Archeological Discoveries

Scholars, travelers, and historians have for many centuries been intrigued by the lost civilizations of the Near East and Southwest Asia and have unearthed and studied their **artifacts**, rituals, and remains for clues to the region's earliest inhabitants.

Medieval scholars, including the twelfth-century C.E. rabbi Benjamin of Tuleda and the Arab Ibn Khaldun (C.E. 1332–1406), described the ruins of Mesopotamia in their writings. However, the Ottoman Turks, who ruled the region from the fourteenth through the early twentieth centuries, showed little continuing interest in its ancient history. A real understanding of the society of

ancient Southwest Asia, based on the remains of local cultures, would await the development of professional archeology in the late nineteenth century C.E.

EARLY EXPLORATION

The decline of Ottoman influence in the early nineteenth century opened Southwest Asia to European colonial ambition and political competition. British and French explorers of this **era** conducted the first systematic investigations of the large mounds of ruins found throughout the region. British scholar and traveler Claudius James Rich (1787–1821) explored the sites of ancient cities including Babylon and Persepolis, collecting artifacts and exhibiting them in England, where they created increased interest in ancient Mesopotamian history and culture. In 1842, Paul Emile Botta, the French consul to the Ottoman Empire, conducted the first **excavation** of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh. These and other expeditions netted a large collection of sculptures, **reliefs**, and texts for British and French museums.

The early- to mid-nineteenth century was also a time when European **linguists** were making significant strides in understanding ancient Mesopotamian languages. The deciphering of the Behistun **Inscription** provided the key to understanding the **cuneiform** script of ancient Mesopotamia. The inscription, carved into a cliff in what is now Iraq, contained the same text in three different languages: Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian. Sir Henry Rawlinson (1810–1895), a British army officer, translated the Old Persian text in 1838, which allowed him and others to decipher the Babylonian cuneiform.

Unfortunately, another product of the widespread interest in Mesopotamian **antiquity** was the practice of grave robbing. Sites of new discoveries often were looted, with the thieves frequently damaging other potentially useful finds in their haste to take valuable specimens. British Egyptologist Wallis Budge (1857–1934), who spent time in the late 1880s investigating stolen cuneiform tablets, found that many goods were stolen by excavators assisting on the digs.

Beginnings of Scientific Archeology

The early explorers who dug in Southwest Asia were mostly enthusiastic amateurs and scholars with little or no training in archeological techniques. By the late 1800s, however, the search for treasure that motivated the first excavations gave way to expeditions based on **historical research** and informed by **historical inquiry** into the lives of the people of ancient Southwest Asia. Professional **archeologists** brought a systematic and scientific approach to the field and applied **historical interpretation and analysis** to explain the significance of their discoveries.

The first truly professional archeological expedition in Southwest Asia was an excavation of Babylon in 1899, which was led by German archeologist Robert Koldewey (1855–1925). His close attention to the strata, or layers, of earth in which remains were found allowed him to date items much more precisely and determine which artifacts were related to one another in time. This was typical of the more rigorous scientific approach to the discipline that applied new approaches, such as **chronological thinking,** to the study of archeological remains.

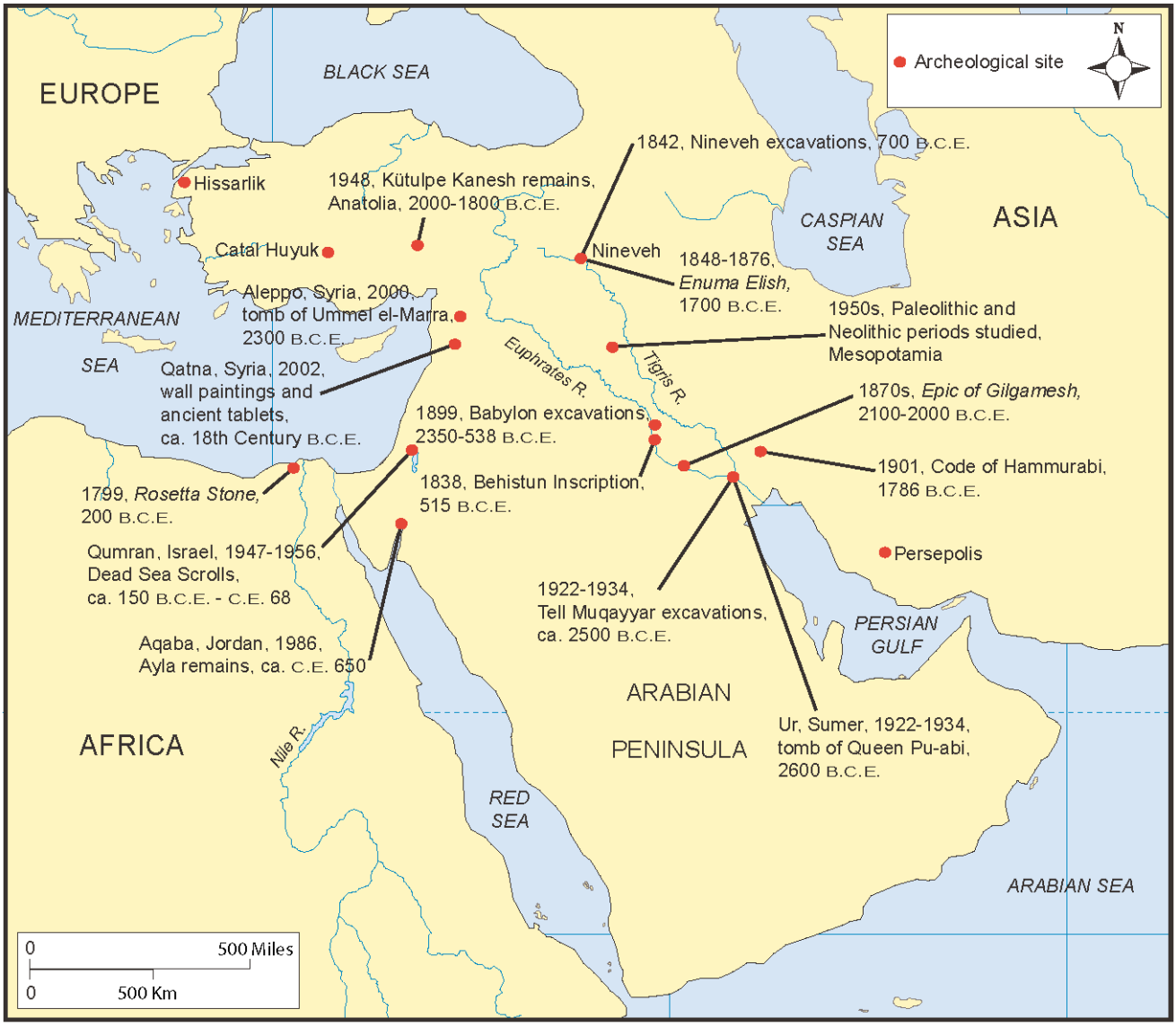
Also characteristic of scientific archeology was a change in the attitude toward excavating sites. Previous amateurs and antiquarians rifled through sites in search of the best-preserved artifacts to acquire and sell or display. Many paid scant attention to preserving or recording the overall condition of the site. The new generation of German archeologists was more interested in seeing how a site developed over time. This usually required careful excavation of multiple layers of habitation at the same site. Archeologists had to take care not to disturb or destroy items found in one layer in their haste to reach older levels. The excavators were also now careful to make an exact record of the location and identity of every item found at a site for future study back home.

DISCOVERIES SINCE WORLD WAR II

Rapid advances in many fields of physical science greatly aided archeologists in their explorations of ancient Southwest Asia. The invention of **radiocarbon**

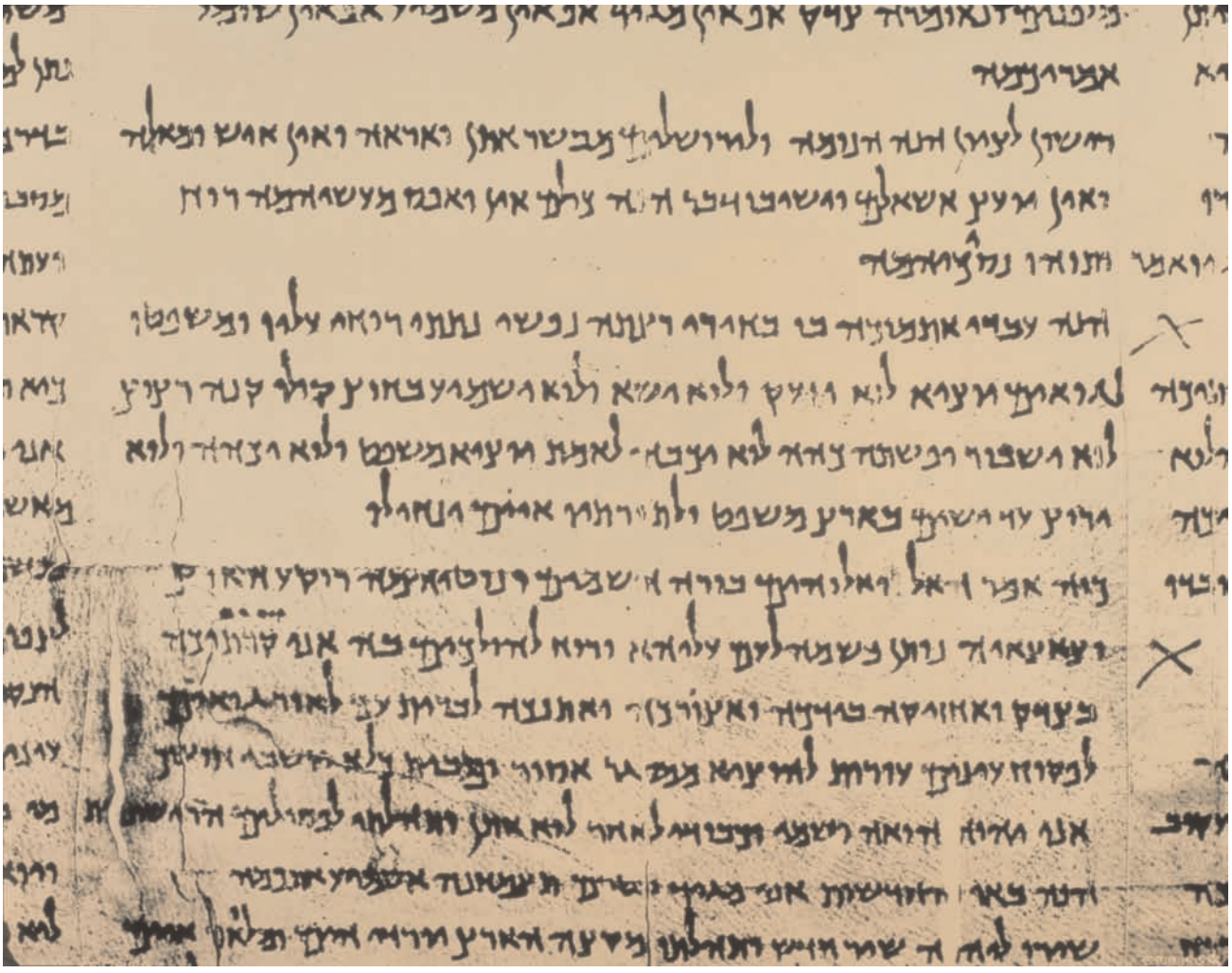
MAJOR ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND SOUTHWEST ASIA

Throughout Southwest Asia, archeological discoveries during the last 200 years have unraveled a great many mysteries about the past. Findings help to tell the history of the ancient cultures of these lands.


EUROPE
BLACK SEA
Archeological site
N
Hissarlik
1948, Kütulpe Kanesh remains, Anatolia, 2000-1800 B.C.E.
1842, Nineveh excavations, 700 B.C.E.
CASPIAN SEA
ASIA
Catal Huyuk
Nineveh
1848-1876, Enuma Elish, 1700 B.C.E.
Aleppo, Syria, 2000, tomb of Ummel el-Marra, 2300 B.C.E.
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
1950s, Paleolithic and Neolithic periods studied, Mesopotamia
Euphrates R.
Tigris R.
Qatna, Syria, 2002, wall paintings and ancient tablets, ca. 18th Century B.C.E.
1899, Babylon excavations, 2350-538 B.C.E.
1870s, Epic of Gilgamesh, 2100-2000 B.C.E.
1901, Code of Hammurabi, 1786 B.C.E.
1799, Rosetta Stone, 200 B.C.E.
1838, Behistun Inscription, 515 B.C.E.
Qumran, Israel, 1947-1956, Dead Sea Scrolls, ca. 150 B.C.E. - C.E. 68
Persepolis
1922-1934, Tell Muqayyar excavations, ca. 2500 B.C.E.
PERSIAN GULF
Aqaba, Jordan, 1986, Ayla remains, ca. C.E. 650
ARABIAN PENINSULA
AFRICA
Nile R.
Ur, Sumer, 1922-1934, tomb of Queen Pu-abi, 2600 B.C.E.
RED SEA
ARABIAN SEA
0 500 Miles
0 500 Km

dating in 1949 allowed for more precise study of the **Paleolithic** and **Neolithic periods** in the region. Studies of plant and animal remains in the 1950s led to much better understanding of the origins of agriculture and animal domestication in Mesopotamia.

In 1948, Turkish archeologist Tashin Özgüç (1916–2005) excavated the remains of the city of Kütulpe Kanesh, an important trading center in eastern Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) in the twentieth to eighteenth centuries B.C.E. The site was of particular interest because of the discovery of an Assyrian merchant colony in this Hittite city. Documents found in the colony record trade between the Assyrian colony and the **city-state** of Assur, as well as trade between Assyrian merchants and local people. The texts are the oldest written documents discovered in Anatolia, and the Hittite words and names recorded in them are the oldest existing written examples of any Indo-European language.



This is a close-up of lines from one of two scrolls containing the text of the Book of Isaiah from the Old Testament, discovered at Qumran, northwest of the Dead Sea. During the late 1940s, the caves in and around Qumran yielded a wealth of similar ancient documents that represent the oldest existing copies of Biblical literature. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

Although there are recent and numerous exceptions, for example in Syria, by the late twentieth century C.E. many of the major archeological sites in Southwest Asia had been discovered and thoroughly explored and recorded. By the 1970s, archeological efforts in the region increasingly turned to preserving existing sites from urban development. Dam construction in countries including Turkey, Syria, and Iraq threatens a significant number of archeological sites in Mesopotamia.

EVIDENCE FROM THE PAST

The artifacts uncovered by scholars and archeologists can provide insight into details of life in ancient societies that may be missing from or less immediate in written records. The vast majority of cuneiform records, for example, deal with commercial transactions and other mundane matters that offer a limited vision of daily life. A look at two archeological discoveries in Southwest Asia shows how scholars use remains to help reconstruct past civilizations.

Tell Muqayyar: Uncovering the Past

By the early twentieth century, most of the ancient Sumerian, Babylonian, and Persian cities had long ago fallen into decay, been abandoned, and then covered by wind-driven sands. The mounds formed by these ancient cities were called "tell" in Arabic and "tel" in Hebrew. Archeologists working in the

TURNING POINT

The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Earliest Scriptures

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a group of ancient Jewish manuscripts discovered in eleven caves near the site of the ancient city of Qumran, near the Dead Sea on modern-day Israel's eastern border. The scrolls, written mostly in Hebrew or Aramaic, contain the earliest copies of most of the Hebrew scriptures. Composed between about 150 B.C.E. and C.E. 68, they constitute the only existing Hebrew scriptural writings predating C.E. 100, making them particularly interesting to religious and Biblical scholars. Almost 900 texts or fragments of texts have been excavated from the caves.

In 1947, a group of Bedouin shepherds, while searching for a lost goat in the desert, found a cave in which the manuscripts had been preserved in jars. From 1947 to 1956, more manuscripts were uncovered. One scroll was nearly 28 feet (8.5 m) long. Scholars have been studying and deciphering the texts, a difficult task because so many of the scrolls consist of fragments that must be pieced together or interpreted without the rest of the document. Some of the scrolls are so fragile that they disintegrate at the slightest touch.

The scrolls contain many different types of writings, both religious and **secular**: texts from every book of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, except those of Esther and Nehemiah; commentaries on religious texts; and writings about the customs and culture of the people who wrote the scrolls, the Essenes. The scrolls also provide previously unknown information about biblical prophets such as Abraham and Noah, including an excerpt that seeks to explain why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Many scholars consider the Dead Sea Scrolls to be the most important archeological discovery of the twentieth century.

region quickly learned that tells generally indicated the site of buried structures.

One such site, Tell Muqayyar, was the object of a professional excavation from 1922 to 1934 by members of the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania. Led by British archeologist Sir Leonard Woolley, this group discovered the ancient Sumerian city of Ur, including the city's Royal Cemetery, where more than 1,800 tombs were found. The importance of this find was rivaled only by the discovery of the tomb of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamen by Howard Carter in 1922.

The cemetery included tombs dating to as early as about 2500 B.C.E. Sixteen of the burial chambers, probably of the most important people interred there, contained a wide assortment of goods that provide evidence for how the upper classes lived. Sumerian royal burial practices are reflected in the tomb of Queen Pu-abi (ca. 2500 B.C.E.?). The corpse was laid out on a wooden platform, wearing a headdress of gold leaves and ribbons and jewelry made of strung blue lapis lazuli, red carnelian stone, and gold beads. Her body was covered by a delicate web of similar beading.

A cylinder seal bearing the queen's name in cuneiform also accompanied the body. Such seals consisted of a cylinder of stone or clay with raised images on its outer surface. The seal was rolled over wet clay, impressing the clay with an image of the raised carving that served to identify the owner of the seal. Pu-abi was buried with wooden chests that would have held clothes for her to wear in the afterlife. Servants who accompanied her into the tomb took positions around her body and drank poison so that they could serve the queen for eternity.

Lost Cities: Islamic Ayla (Aqaba)

Even though many ancient sites in Southwest Asia have yielded their secrets, archeologists are constantly surprised to find new and previously unexplored ones. The 1986 excavation of the early Islamic city of Ayla, located on the Gulf of Aqaba in what is now southern Jordan, provides a recent example.

Ayla was founded by Islamic settlers in about C.E. 650 and built alongside a previously existing town in accordance with early Islam's teachings that Mus-

ARCHEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

C.E. 1838 British officer Sir Henry Rawlinson translates Behistun Inscription, leading to the deciphering of the cuneiform script of ancient Mesopotamia

C.E. 1842 French consul Paul Emile Botta excavates the Assyrian city of Nineveh

C.E. 1899 German archeologist Robert Koldewey conducts first scientific excavation in Southwest Asia at the ancient city of Babylon

C.E. 1922–1934 English archeologist Sir Leonard Woolley leads excavation of ancient Sumerian city of Ur

C.E. 1948 Turkish archeologist Tashin Özgüç (1916–2005) excavates Kütulpe Kanesh, an important ancient center of trade between Anatolia and Mesopotamia

C.E. 1949 Radiocarbon dating is invented, making possible detailed studies of Stone Age cultures of Mesopotamia

C.E. 1950s Archeological studies of plant and animal remains uncover roots of agricultural development in ancient Southwest Asia

C.E. 1970s Archeologists in Near East and Southwest Asia focus efforts on preservation of existing sites rather than discovery of new ones

C.E. 1986 Discovery of lost Islamic city of Ayla beneath the modern-day Jordanian city of Aqaba

C.E. 2000 Unlooted tomb, dated to 2300 B.C.E., discovered at Umm el-Marra, 25 miles (40 km) east of modern-day Aleppo in Syria with bodies of two women and two children, gold and silver ornaments, and lapis lazuli jewelry inside

C.E. 2002 Wall paintings and archive of ancient tablets, dating to the mid-second millennium B.C.E., discovered at the site of Qatna, Syria

C.E. 2005 Archeologist Eilat Mazar discovers large building in Jerusalem, possible the tenth-century B.C.E. palace of King David

lims should live in communities apart from those of other faiths. Then as now, Ayla (the modern-day city of Aqaba) was an important port in which goods from Egypt, Asia, and India entered the Arabian Peninsula. An earthquake destroyed the city in C.E. 1068, and sands soon covered its ruins. Over time, the city of Aqaba developed on the site, covering and obliterating all traces of the ancient city.

The site was discovered while preparations were being made for the Aqaba Yacht Club and a new luxury hotel to be built at the location. Archeologists from the University of Chicago and the Jordanian Ministry of Antiquities dug down through the sands and ruins, revealing the 400-year history of the forgotten community of Ayla. The site shows clear evidence of Islamic city planning. The corners of the city's outer walls were centered on the four cardinal points of the compass (north, south, east, and west). Following the pattern of other Islamic cities, the palace of the emir, the political leader of the community, was built to the *qibla* side of the mosque. The qibla points out the direction of Mecca towards which Muslims must pray.

A sack of gold coins from Egypt found at Ayla dates the site to at least C.E. 1013. It is thought that a North African merchant may have buried the coins at roughly the same time that Ayla was attacked by local Bedouin raiders. Historical records show that the surviving population was sold into slavery and the city was abandoned. Evidence of its final destruction is found in the foundations of its outer walls, which were cracked as a result of the 1068 earthquake.

Ayla is an example of how archeology can reveal the history of a people and a place and enhance what little was recorded in governmental records and chronicle accounts. The achievements of those living in southwest Asia are still being uncovered today, allowing historians to constantly reevaluate the lives, beliefs, and actions of those who made civilization a reality five thousand years ago.

See also: Assyria; Babylonia; Darius I, the Great; Islam; Language and Writing; Mesopotamia; Persia; Sumer; Ur.

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Art and Architecture

Creative artistic expression throughout the ancient Near East and Southwest Asia, from the smallest decorative objects to the most imposing urban structures, was meant not only to please the eye but also to communicate the values of the **artisan's** culture. Art and architecture therefore provide key insights into the daily life of ancient Southwest Asian people.

Sumerian art and architecture, for example, emphasized religious activities and beliefs, and the most important buildings in a Sumerian city were dedicated to worship of the local deity. Similarly, the massive architecture of the militaristic Babylonian and Persian empires was meant to create a sense of awe and to impress the viewer with the power of those kingdoms' rulers.

ART

Ancient Mesopotamian art reveals details of social organization that facilitate an **historical understanding** of the cultures that produced it. The subjects that artists chose, and how the artist portrayed those subjects, reflect contemporary social conventions and what members of the culture considered important. For illiterate nomadic societies, such as the Scythians of Central Asia who invaded Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) in the seventh century B.C.E., art often provides the best surviving evidence of their cultures.

Figurines

The Sumerians, who inhabited southern Mesopotamia in the fourth and mid- to late third millennium B.C.E., produced thousands of small baked clay figurines. These statues portray both men and women, and most depict the subject praying or making an offering to a god. The figurines feature individuals from various social classes. Some represent government officials wearing highly decorated cloth as a sign of office. Others depict warriors arrayed in battle gear that includes a war axe and a close-fitting helmet. Raised patterns on the helmets mimic slightly curled hair and a pair of ears, evoking an image of the warrior's bare head. Prisoners of war are displayed naked and bound with ropes.

A comparison of Sumerian art to Egyptian art of the same **era** reveals significant differences in social attitudes between the two cultures. While Sumerian art depicts a variety of classes, art produced in Egypt during the same period relegates com-

"The Tower of Babel" is an oil painting on panel created by the Dutch artist Pieter Brueghel the Elder in 1563. Many scholars believe that the great stepped platforms of ancient temples, called *ziggurats*, which dominated Babylonian cities, may have inspired the Biblical story about the tower of Babel. (Pieter Brueghel the Elder/The Bridgeman Art Library/Getty Images)

moners to one of three subordinate social roles: slaves, servants, or farmers. In addition, Egyptian art of the third millennium B.C.E. portrays politically or socially prominent individuals as physically larger than those in subordinate roles. Sumerian figurines, by contrast, show all members of society with a certain amount of dignity and in a more representative scale. This suggests that Sumerian society likely was more **egalitarian** than Egyptian society at this time.

Metalwork

Metalwork from the ancient world, whether made of precious materials such as gold or silver, or wrought from relatively inexpensive ones such as iron, is invaluable to historians and **archeologists**. Pottery can be smashed into shards, and **textiles** will quickly rot and decay, but metal **artifacts** can remain intact for millennia.

Because southern Mesopotamia lacks natural sources of metal ores, the Sumerians and later Babylonians were forced to import gold from Egypt and silver, copper, lead, and iron from Anatolia. Despite the shortage of local materials, southern Mesopotamian metalsmiths produced intricate work such as a metal sculpture of a male goat caught in a golden thicket dating to about 2500 B.C.E. The goat, a symbol of fertility, is caught in a

tree that symbolizes Inanna, the goddess of love and fertility. Here again, the subject matter reflects the Sumerian community's pressing concern with successful reproduction and group survival.

The nomadic Scythians, who occupied much of Anatolia from the seventh to the first centuries B.C.E., left a wealth of metal artifacts that have allowed scholars to reconstruct this ancient culture. Archeologists have excavated scores of Scythian drinking vessels, plates, and pins decorated with scenes of warriors in battle camp and sitting around watch fires. Breastplates used to protect Scythian horses in battle feature scenes of fierce conflict between real and mythical animals. A fourth-century B.C.E. depiction of a warrior riding at full gallop offers a unique insight into Scythian warriors in combat. Using only a bridle and reins to control his horse, the warrior prepares to strike at an unseen enemy with his knife. His footwear has no heels, indicating that he is riding without stirrups.

Mosaics

Mosaics—images created by combining small pieces of different materials to form a distinct visual pattern—have been found throughout the ancient Near East and Southwest Asia. Early mosaics typically portrayed scenes of hunting or other pastimes. Mosaic was a favored art form of both the **Hellenistic** Greeks, who controlled much of the region from the fourth through first centuries B.C.E., and of the Romans, who subsequently defeated the Greeks and replaced them as rulers of the region.

Some of the most impressive mosaics in Southwest Asia are located in the city of Madaba, in modern-day Jordan. They date to the second through sixth centuries C.E., when the region was under Roman, and later Byzantine, control. Perhaps the most famous of these mosaics is a sixth-century floor map of Southwest Asia that originally measured 52 feet (16 m) long and 20 feet (6 m) wide. It showed every major city, valley, oasis, and river from the area now occupied by Lebanon, south to the Nile River delta, and west to the deserts of eastern Jordan. Only a small portion of it remains intact, including a section detailing the major buildings and walls of the ancient city of Jerusalem.

Mosaics of a later era are tied to religious and political developments in the region. For example, some early Christians interpreted the Biblical commandment prohibiting graven images to mean that no human or animal could be portrayed in art. The Byzantine emperor Leo III (r. 717–741) decreed in 726 that any such images already existing be altered. The Madaba mosaics, as well as others also located in what is now Jordan, were defaced. Many others were partially destroyed.

Islam, which spread throughout Southwest Asia in the late seventh and eighth centuries C.E., also prohibited the portrayal of human images in art. Nevertheless, Islamic artists embraced the mosaic art form, creating elaborate geometric designs as well as mosaics that recorded in Arabic script passages from the Koran, the Islamic holy text. Islamic religious architecture features generous use of interior mosaics on both the walls and ceilings of mosques.

ARCHITECTURE

Southwest Asia was the site of the world's earliest human settlements and its first cities. Nearly 10,000 years ago, inhabitants of Anatolia planned communities to maximize local resources and protect themselves from attack by hostile neighbors. By the fourth millennium B.C.E., they were building monumental structures that dominated the landscapes of the early Mesopotamian **city-states**.

CITY PLANNING

The oldest known human settlement, Çatal Huyuk, in north-central Anatolia, shows signs of deliberate planning. Inhabited as early as 7500 B.C.E., its residents chose to build groups of houses that shared common walls rather than freestanding houses for each family. The entrance to each home consisted of a hole in the roof, which also provided light and allowed smoke from cooking fires to escape. The arrangement of houses, and the limited access to their interiors, made the settlement easier to defend from invaders. Invasion was a constant threat in southern Mesopotamia as well, so the Sumerians built thick defensive walls around cities such as Ur, Uruk, and Lagash. Farmers lived inside the walled city and walked out to the surrounding fields each day.

Like most Mesopotamian cities, Babylon was surrounded by massive defensive walls featuring several gates to allow traffic in and out of the city. The brightly decorated Ishtar Gate, reconstructed in what is now Iraq, was the best known of the city gates of ancient Babylon. (Bruno Barbier/Robert Harding World Imagery/Getty Images)

The center of every Sumerian city was occupied by religious structures, including a temple complex containing schoolhouses and grain warehouses, as well as administrative buildings such as palaces and law courts. This layout, in which government buildings were located in close proximity to religious structures, reinforced the connection between religion and royal authority in Mesopotamian society.

Religious and Political Architecture

The most important structure in a Sumerian or Babylonian city-state was the *ziggurat*. As the center of religious worship for residents, it was the largest and tallest structure, physically dominating the city. A ziggurat consisted of a series of two to seven rectangular stone platforms stacked atop one another, each smaller than the one immediately below it. A staircase led to the top of the ziggurat, where priests performed sacrifices at an open-air altar dedicated to the city's patron god or goddess. The sheer size of the ziggurat reflects the dominant role religion played in ancient Mesopotamian daily life.

Ancient cultures, most notably the Babylonian and Persian empires that dominated the region from the seventh through fourth centuries B.C.E., also expressed political power through their architecture. The Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar II (r. 604–562 B.C.E.) made a statement of his power by having the Ishtar Gate constructed on the north side of the capital city of Babylon. Built in about 575 B.C.E. to honor Ishtar, the Persian goddess of love and fertility, the gateway and surrounding walls stood 47 feet (14 m) tall and 32 feet (10 m) wide. The brick, containing five vertical bands of artwork, was covered in gold leaf and bright turquoise glaze, making it glow in the sunlight. The massive and sumptuous structure displayed not only the king's wealth and power, but also his great respect for and close relationship to the goddess. The expense of its

construction was intended to awe his subjects and strike fear in his enemies. In this respect, it is typical of much ancient Southwest Asian art and architecture, combining elements of both the sacred and the **secular** to make a statement about the culture that produced it.

See also: Archeological Discoveries; Assyria; Babylonia; Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro; Mesopotamia; Scythians; Sumer; Ur.

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Assyria

Region of northern Mesopotamia located on the upper Tigris River and center of two influential empires in ancient Southwest Asia. The region took its name from Assur, the original capital of the first of these empires. The Assyrians built the largest standing army in the region and used it to control northern Mesopotamia from about 2000 B.C.E. to 612 B.C.E.

The earliest evidence of Assyrian kingship dates to ca. 2000 B.C.E., but the first king to project Assyrian power was Shamshi-Adad I (r. 1808–1776 B.C.E.). He conquered neighboring territories and consolidated royal authority over all northern Mesopotamia. Assyria's location, trade, and military power brought it into conflict with the Babylonian kingdom to the south. Babylonia's king Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E.) conquered Assyria shortly after assuming the throne.

Babylon's dominance of Assyria lasted a century, during which time Assyria broke into a number of smaller territories ruled by **vassal** kings dependent on the Babylonians. Ashur-uballit I (r. ca. 1365–1330 B.C.E.) conquered these lands to create the first true Assyrian Empire, reigniting a rivalry between Assyria and Babylon that lasted until the twelfth century B.C.E. In 1120 B.C.E., the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (r. ca. 1115–1076 B.C.E.) began a new period of territorial conquest and eventually ruled over a region stretching from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Tigris River in the east and as far north as the Black Sea.

The kings who succeeded Tiglath-Pileser I were politically weak, and for the next two centuries Assyria fought for dominance of the region with the neighboring kingdom of Urartu and endured invasions by Aramean nomads from the south. Assyria's fortunes rebounded under King Ashurnasirpal II (r. ca. 883–859 B.C.E.), who established the second Assyrian Empire. He conquered the Arameans and reasserted Assyrian control from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. Under Ashurnasirpal II, the Assyrians built the largest professional standing army seen to date and developed a reputation as superior warriors.

ASSYRIA

CA. 2000 B.C.E. Earliest evidence of Assyrian kingship

1808–1776 B.C.E. Reign of Shamshi-Adad I, first powerful king of Assyria, who extends Assyrian authority over all of Mesopotamia

CA. 1790–1690 B.C.E. Assyria breaks up into a number of small territories ruled by vassal kings subject to the rule of Babylon

CA. 1365–1330 B.C.E. Rule of King Ashur-uballit I, who reunites fragmented Assyrian lands, creating first Assyrian Empire

CA. 1115–1076 B.C.E. Reign of king Tiglath-Pileser I, who extends Assyrian borders from the Mediterranean Sea east to the Tigris River and north to the Black Sea

CA. 1090–883 B.C.E. Assyria struggles with northern kingdom of Urartu and southern Aramean nomads for control of conquered territory

CA. 883–859 B.C.E. Reign of Ashurnasirpal II, who defeats the Arameans and founds the second Assyrian Empire

612 B.C.E. Babylonian king Nabopolassar invades and destroys the second Assyrian Empire

The rulers who followed Ashurnasirpal II built on his success, but by the early eighth century B.C.E., the familiar pattern of internal conflict, invasion, and weak kings followed by stronger rulers was reestablished. It ended only 612 B.C.E. when the Babylonian king Nabopolassar (r. 626–605 B.C.E.) invaded and destroyed the Assyrian Empire.

The king's power came from his dual roles as head of the military and high priest to Ashur, the god of war and the most important of the Assyrian gods. However, while brutal in warfare, Assyrian kings also encouraged the spread of learning, architecture, and art that celebrated their military successes and interaction with their gods. Ashurnasirpal II oversaw a flowering of art and architecture in Assyria, sponsoring the construction of monumental building projects such as the botanical and zoological gardens and the Great Ziggurat in the city of Nimrud. He also built a library in Nineveh filled with **cuneiform** tablets containing religious texts, literature, and scientific findings.

See also: Arameans; Babylonia; Culture and Traditions; Sumer; Technology and Inventions.

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Babylonia

Southern region of Mesopotamia that was home to one of the dominant cultures in the ancient Middle East. Babylonia's northern frontier began about where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers make their nearest approach to one another. From there it stretched south to the regions of Sumer and Akkad and other independent **city-states** near the Persian Gulf. Between the eighteenth and sixth centuries B.C.E., Babylonia enjoyed several peaks of power and influence, alternating with periods of decline, until its final collapse in 539 B.C.E.

TURNING POINT

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. According to the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (90–30 B.C.E.), the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar II (r. 604–562 B.C.E.) built the gardens for his wife, who was raised in a mountainous area of Persia and missed the landscape of her homeland. To make her happy, Nebuchadrezzar built a multilevel garden, filled with terraces planted with exotic and colorful plants brought from his wife's homeland and from throughout the empire. The gardens would not have hung as from cables, but would have draped over the walls of the garden. Even more impressively, Diodorus Siculus claims that Nebuchadrezzar also built a huge lake on which he, his wife, and members of the royal family could sail. To create such an oasis in the midst of a desert, where water was a valuable resource not to be wasted, was a testament to Nebuchadrezzar's power.

In addition to Diodorus Siculus, the Greek geographer Strabo (63 B.C.E.–C.E. 24) also vividly described the gardens in his writings. However, no Babylonian document mentions such gardens in Babylon, and **archeologists** have found no evidence of them. The Greek writers may have been referring to the gardens in the ancient Assyrian capital at Nineveh and simply situated them in Babylon. Whether a myth or a lost reality, the Hanging Gardens symbolize the active efforts humans were exerting to control the environment and recreate it in a manner more suited to their tastes.

RISE AND FALL OF BABYLONIA

CA. 2350–1900 B.C.E. Akkadian rule of Babylonia

CA. 2334–CA. 2279 B.C.E. Reign of Sargon the Great, most prominent of Akkadian kings

CA. 2000–1595 B.C.E. Old Babylonian Period, marked by Amorite control and expansion of Babylonian territory

1792–1750 B.C.E. Reign of Hammurabi, greatest king of Old Babylonian Period and creator of one of the world's earliest law codes

CA. 1595 B.C.E. Hittites from Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and Kassites from what is now Iran conquer Old Babylonian Empire

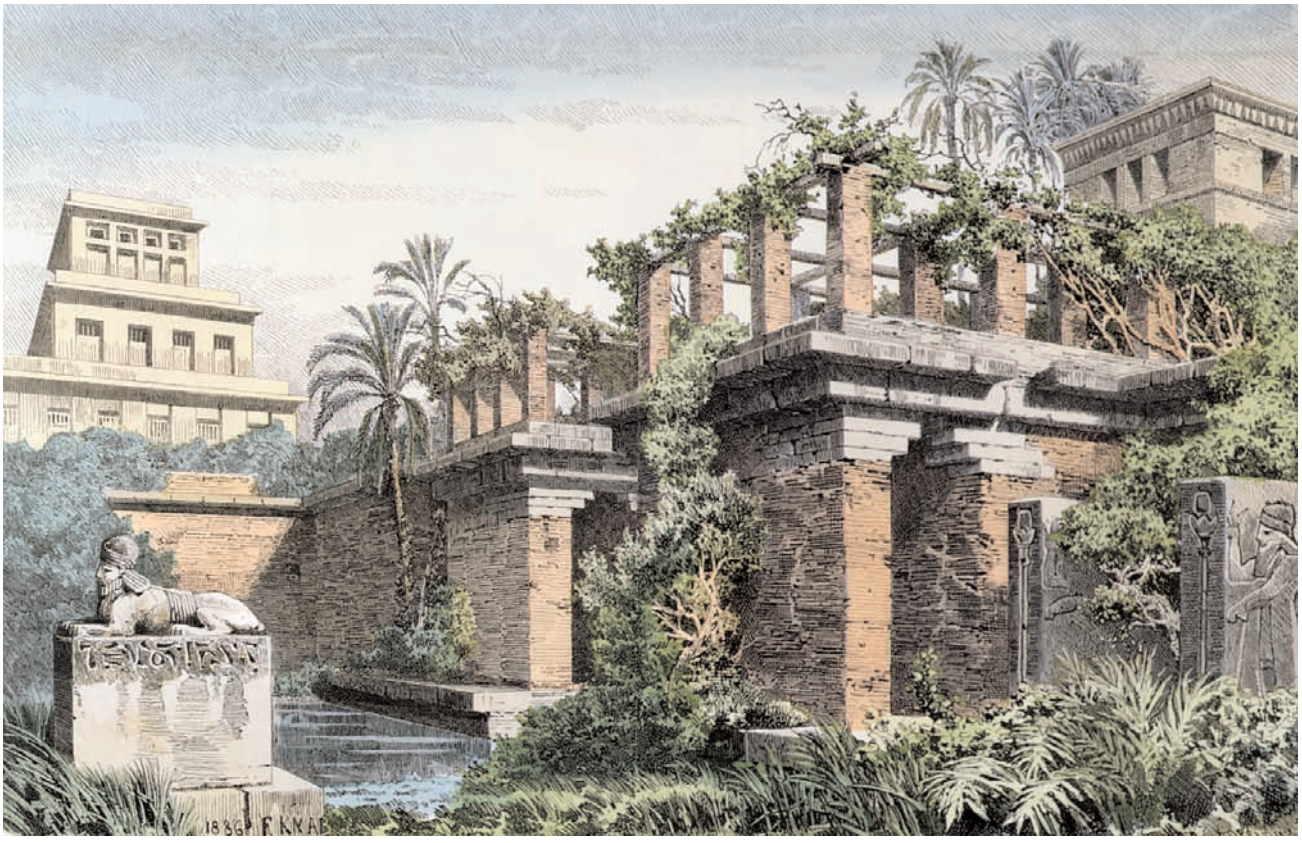
CA. 1595–1000 B.C.E. Middle Babylonian Period, during which Babylonian culture and religion continues to flourish in Mesopotamia under foreign domination

612–538 B.C.E. Neo-Babylonian Empire arises, dominating Mesopotamia until toppled by Persian Empire

HISTORY

By the early third millennium B.C.E., a dozen or so cities had arisen throughout Babylonia. These early urban areas thrived under the rule of the Akkadians (ca. 2350–1900 B.C.E.), and especially during the reign of the Akkadian king Sargon the Great (ca. 2334–ca. 2279 B.C.E.). Following the Akkadians,

Taken from an 1886 series titled "Seven Wonders of the World," by German artist Ferdinand Knab, this lithograph depicts the artist's conception of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Although renowned as one the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, archeologists have discovered no physical evidence of the Hanging Gardens. (Knab, Ferdinand (1834–1902)/Archives Charmet, Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library)



THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE, CA. 625-539 B.C.E.

The Babylonian Empire spanned most of southwest Asia, controlling lands from modern-day Egypt in the west to present-day Turkey (Anatolia) in the north and extending as far eastward as Persia.

Babylonia fell under the control of a succession of invaders, including the Elamites from what is now Iran and the Amorites who lived west of the Euphrates. By about 1900 B.C.E., the empire these peoples created eventually expanded to reach the Mediterranean Sea in the west, the Persian Gulf in the east, Anatolia to the north, and the Arabian Desert to the south.

Throughout its history, Babylonian society took as its model the culture that arose in the southern region of Sumer during the fourth millennium B.C.E. Sumerian influence remained strong even though power in the region changed hands several times, and many Sumerian cultural elements persisted for thousands of years. These included **cuneiform** writing, **polytheistic** religions, and strict social structures and king-centered political organization.

The post-Akkadian history of Babylonia is divided into three **eras**: the Old Babylonian Period

(ca. 2000–1595 B.C.E.), the Middle Babylonian Period (ca. 1595–1000 B.C.E.) and the Neo-Babylonian Period (612–539 B.C.E.). The Old Babylonian Period was marked by Amorite control over the region (the Amorites were a **Semitic** people living west of the Euphrates River). It is during this period that the renowned King Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E.) ruled and developed a set of laws , which is the oldest, complete law code still in existence today.

After Hammurabi, a series of weak kings came to the throne. By 1595 B.C.E., Babylonia had been conquered by the Hittites from Anatolia and the Kassites from what is now Iran. Nevertheless, the religious, political, and social institutions that defined Babylonia continued during these successor states until the Persians conquered the region in the sixth century B.C.E.

CULTURE

Babylonian gods were associated with aspects of nature, such as the wind, rain, and water. The most important ones were seen as the founders and sometimes patrons of the major cities in the region. The Babylonians viewed their gods as fickle, and as likely to harm them as protect them. An official class of priests acted as intermediaries between the citizens and their patron deity, offering sacrifices to honor or appease the gods in hopes of protecting the city and ensuring its prosperity.

An innovative people, the Babylonians built on the earlier developments in the area of mathematics. They developed a base-60 numerical system whose influence is preserved to this day in the division of hours into 60 minutes and minutes into 60 seconds. The division of the circle into 360 degrees is also a legacy of the Babylonians. Their mathematical abilities also enabled them to develop the engineering skills needed to build impressive projects such as extensive irrigation systems, strong defensive walls for their cities, and the massive *ziggurats*. Babylonians were also among the world's earliest astronomers, building observatories near their temple sites. Babylonian astronomy was inspired by the belief that the gods communicated to humans through heavenly signs, which led them to identify constellations, create the concept of the zodiac, and develop astronomical tables to predict eclipses and other heavenly phenomena. Their fascination with the skies reflected the widespread notion that what occurred in heaven provided clues to future events on earth.

See also: Assyria; Chaldeans; Hammurabi; Hittites; Mesopotamia; Sumer; Technology and Invention.

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Bible

The sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity and written between the eighth century B.C.E. and the second century C.E. Although composed hundreds of years apart by adherents of two different religious movements, the texts combined to form a common set of Christian scriptures during the late fifth and early sixth centuries C.E.

The first and older set of texts comprises the Hebrew Bible, or scriptures, known to Christians as the Old Testament. These texts include the five books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), revered teachings generally attributed to the prophet Moses and which form the basis of Jewish religious law. The Hebrew scriptures also contain books with the teachings of the prophets and other sacred books with psalms and proverbs. The Hebrew Bible also traces the history of the people and kingdom of Israel and the covenant between the Israelites and their god, Yahweh.

Scholars believe that the Torah was composed in the tenth century B.C.E. and transmitted orally until being written down between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.E. The later books were written at various times, with the last ones composed in the fifth century B.C.E. The Hebrew scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, the religious language of Judaism. Small portions, including the book of Daniel, were written in Aramaic, the language spoken by most Jews in daily life in the Middle East.

The second part of the Bible contains the Christian scriptures, also known as the New Testament. These books were written in Greek between about C.E. 60 and 120 to help convert the Greek populations of Asia Minor to Christianity. The New Testament contains four books, known as Gospels (the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), which contain material on the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 B.C.E.–ca. C.E. 30), who founded the Christian religion and whom Christians regard as the son of God. The New Testament also includes the Acts of the Apostles, which details the efforts of Jesus's followers to spread his teachings after his death. Lastly, it contains letters of instruction written by Saint Paul and other early church leaders to the fledgling Christian communities.

Jews do not believe that Jesus was the son of God, so they do not include the New Testament as part of their religious faith or tradition. Christians accept both the testaments as sacred texts; however, the New Testament is the heart of their faith since it focuses on the teachings of Jesus. Because Muslims, Jews, and Christians revere many of the same religious figures, such as the Hebrew **patriarchs** Abraham and the prophet Moses, Muslims also accept many parts of the Bible as divinely inspired truth. However, they view Jesus as a prophet, much like Moses, rather than as the son of God.

See also: Christianity; Islam; Jews and Judaism; Language and Writing; Religion.

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Byzantine Empire

Eastern Mediterranean realm that evolved from the Greek-speaking portion of the Roman Empire beginning in the late third century C.E. The empire took its name from the city of Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul), which served as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. Although the Western Roman Empire would fall to Germanic invaders in the late fifth century C.E., Byzantium would survive for another 1,000 years.

In the late third century C.E., Emperor Diocletian (ca. C.E. 245–312) split the Roman Empire into eastern and western halves to facilitate governance of its far-flung domains. Faced with Germanic invasions and a

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE, CA. C.E. 800-1000

At its height, the Byzantine Empire spanned all of modern-day Turkey and Greece, as well as much of Italy and parts of eastern Europe.

significantly weakened economy, Emperor Constantine I (r. C.E. 306–337) decided in 330 to leave the deeply troubled western half and take direct control over the eastern half. The east enjoyed easy access to abundant Egyptian grain harvests, political and social stability, a healthy climate, a thriving economy, and vibrant cultural centers; it also was under no particular threat of invasion. These factors made it appealing to the emperor, as did its early adoption of Christianity, in which he had privately come to believe.

When Constantine moved to his new capital (later renamed Constantinople in his honor), he took the wealthiest and most talented officials with him. This left the western empire under the rule of a succession of weak emperors, who quickly lost control over its territory and military. By 476, the western empire had collapsed. The eastern half thrived thanks to its resources and Constantine's ability to establish a new style of imperial authority in an increasingly non-Roman pattern, a style that was followed by his imperial successors.

CULTURE

The Byzantine Empire, as the realm of Constantine and his successors came to be known, was a mix of Roman, Greek, Christian, and, eventually, Islamic influences. The empire maintained Roman political structures such as the Senate, but Eastern elements were increasingly introduced. For example, the emperor in the West had been considered first among equals, dressed like ordinary citizens, and was accessible to his subjects. In the east, Constantine and his successors adopted a more formal and remote

style of ruling. They gave audience to few people, and those allowed to see the emperor were required to follow elaborate court rituals emphasizing their inferiority, such as not speaking until spoken to, and never showing their backs to the emperor.

More importantly, the emperor exercised authority without significant interference from the Christian church. By the fifth century C.E., the bishop of Rome had emerged as a political force to rival the emperors of the crumbling Western Roman Empire. His counterpart in the east, the bishop of Constantinople, faced a more powerful imperial presence that kept the church's power in check. By C.E. 1054, the Greek-speaking Eastern Orthodox Church and the western, Latin-speaking Roman Catholic Church split after centuries of disagreement over specific beliefs, practices, and the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome. While the Roman Catholic Church's **secular** power increased steadily in the following centuries, the Eastern Orthodox Church remained subordinate to Byzantine imperial authority.

Seven centuries before Constantine's arrival, **Hellenistic** culture had been introduced to southwest Asia by the Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), who had conquered the region. Constantine and his successors found that the people's acceptance of Greek cultural ideas freed rulers from the restrictions of traditional Roman politics and society. These ideas included the opportunity for strong emperors to rule without interference from the Senate, to spend state revenue as they saw fit, and to openly practice Christianity.

Byzantine art focused on religion, which was at the center of life and activity. Icons, portraits of religious figures, predominated. Because early Christians widely considered realistic representation of objects to be a form of idol worship, Byzantine icons featured rigid, two-dimensional representations of the saints, Jesus, and especially Jesus' mother, Mary. Early Byzantine architecture continued imperial Roman traditions, including extensive use of the arch. The basilica, a long structure composed of a large central aisle separated by rows of columns from two smaller side aisles, was another common Byzantine design, which became associated with larger church buildings. Later Byzantine architecture showed strong eastern influences, such as elaborate domes and heavily decorated or carved exterior walls.

PROBLEMS

The fortunes of Byzantium often relied upon the strengths of its ruler. Weaker emperors bribed would-be invaders, such as Attila the Hun (ca. C.E. 406–453), or used marriage and military alliances to protect their lands. Strong rulers, such as Justinian I (r. C.E. 527–565), waged wars of conquest while stabilizing and centralizing their authority. In the mid-seventh century, Muslim invaders originating in the Arabian Peninsula conquered large areas of the Byzantine Empire. By the eleventh century, the Byzantine emperor's effective authority was limited to the city of Constantinople.

As Islamic forces captured increasingly larger tracts of Byzantine territory, Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus (r. C.E. 1081–1118) requested military assistance from the West. In response, Pope Urban II (r. C.E. 1088–1099) called for a crusade in 1095, with the intention of rallying forces to restore control of the Middle East to Christian authority. Over the next 200 years, nine crusades of decreasing effectiveness were launched against the Muslims. When it at last became clear that recapturing the Holy Land was an unrealistic goal, the crusades ended and Byzantium was left to fend for itself. During this time, the empire waxed and waned, occasionally growing to include much of the Balkans and parts of Asia Minor, at other times shrinking to a small area surrounding Constantinople.

In 1453, Sultan Mehmed II (C.E. r. 1444–1446 and 1451–1481), leader of the Ottoman Turks, conquered Constantinople. The fall of the city marked the end of the Byzantine Empire. While the political authority of the Byzantine emperors ended, their style of eastern despotism, the state's role in encouraging a religious agenda, unchecked use of revenue resources to support the state as the ruler wished, military and territorial gains, and cultural influences on education and science continued and grew under the Ottomans.

See also: Christianity; Islam.

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Canaan *See* Jews and Judaism.

Çatal Huyuk [ku-tal hu-yook]

Site in what is now southwest Turkey, believed to be the world's oldest **Neolithic** urban settlement. The town, which according to **radio-carbon dating** was inhabited by about 7500 B.C.E., had an average population of some 6,000 people. It was built on a 65-foot-high (19.8-m) mound from which it derives its name—Çatal Huyuk means "fork mound" in Turkish. The settlement represents a transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a sedentary, urban-based existence.˚

The surviving ruins, discovered in C.E. 1958 and first excavated in the early 1960s, provide evidence of how early towns were organized and how buildings were used and decorated. They also offer insights into religious practices of the time. The mud-brick huts found at the site are built side by side and share walls. No pathways run between the buildings. Instead, entry to each structure was gained by a hole in the roof, which was reached by ladders on the outside and inside of the building. The same hole allowed smoke from cooking fires to escape, and fresh air and sunshine to reach the interior.

Each home had a similar floor plan of three defined spaces: a central room connected by stairs or ladders to elevated sleeping platforms, with small storage rooms located on the ground level. The central room served as a kitchen and site for other daily chores. The elevated platforms, which featured stone seating areas, were used not only for sleeping but also served as work areas. The interior walls were finished in smooth plaster and all buildings, inside and out, were decorated with geometric murals and female and male figurines. Painted images vary, depicting hunting scenes, wild animals, and vultures attacking human figures.

While **archeologists** know little of the inhabitants' specific religious beliefs, they have excavated female figurines, perhaps images of a mother goddess, in fields and storage areas. The inhabitants may have placed the figurines in these places as a way to protect ritually the grain stored there. Hundreds of these female figurines have been found in almost all structures excavated so far. Some buildings containing a greater number of icons, images, and graves are thought to be shrines or religious centers. Graves were often located in such buildings, but the dead were also buried under the hearths of homes, where the cooking fires were located. Corpses were placed in a tight sitting position either in baskets or wrapped in reed mats. Collections of bones have

also been located and some skeletons are missing their skulls. Others have skulls covered with plaster and painted to look as they had in life.

Over time, the inhabitants of Çatal Huyuk domesticated sheep and cattle and became less dependent on hunting wild animals. Their diet was supplemented by crops of almonds, peas, and wheat. In addition to farming, they made pottery for storage of food and water, **textiles** for clothing, and mirrors. They fashioned tools out of volcanic rock known as obsidian, and traded excess grain, pottery, and tools for items such as sea shells from the Mediterranean and flint from what is now Syria. Archeologists estimate that the site was abandoned some time around 6500 B.C.E., for unknown reasons.

See also: Agriculture; Anatolia.

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Chaldeans

People of southern Mesopotamia who led a revolt against the Assyrian Empire in the first millennium B.C.E. and established the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The Chaldeans were one of many militaristic peoples in Mesopotamia living in the shadow of the Assyrians.

Upon the death of the Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal (r. ca. 669–627 B.C.E.), the Chaldeans, under their leader Nabopolassar (r. 626–605 B.C.E.), attacked and conquered Assyrian territory including the city of Babylon. The Chaldeans received assistance from the Medes, a people living in what is now Iran, who were challenging Assyrian dominance over the region. In 609 B.C.E., Nabopolassar captured the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh, thus completing the destruction of the Assyrian Empire.

Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadrezzar II (r. 604–562 B.C.E.), succeeded his father as king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and became the most prominent of the Neo-Babylonian kings. He united the Chaldeans with the Medes by marrying the daughter of the Medean king, and spent his reign expanding Babylonian power. In 597 B.C.E., Nebuchadrezzar attacked the Kingdom of Judah and captured Jerusalem. After putting down a popular rebellion there in 586 B.C.E., he punished the inhabitants by taking their lands and homes and forcing them to move in small groups to other places in his kingdom. This event, known as the Babylonian captivity, lasted until ca. 538 B.C.E., when the Persian Empire defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland.

Although an eager and successful warrior, Nebuchadrezzar spent much of his reign rebuilding Nineveh and Babylon and erecting temples, libraries, and new defensive walls. Under his reign, Babylon grew to cover more than 500 acres (200 hectares) with city walls wide enough for two chariots to run side by side alongside their tops. However, the building project with which Nebuchadrezzar is most often associated, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, may not have existed. Supposedly built around 660 B.C.E., the gardens were said to have covered acres with terraced planting beds and included an artificial lake.

Nebuchadrezzar was succeeded by a series of weak kings who were unable to maintain control over the territory that he and Nabopolassar had conquered. In 538 B.C.E., King Cyrus II, the Great, of Persia (r. ca. 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.) combined forces with the Chaldeans' former allies, the Medes, to topple the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

See also: Assyria; Babylonia; Mesopotamia; Persia.

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Excavations in present-day Iraq revealed the remains of the city walls of ancient Babylon. Like many cities in the ancient Near East and Southwest Asia, Babylon was partially or completely destroyed and later rebuilt on the same site. (J.P. De Manne/Robert Harding World Imagery/Getty Images)

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Christianity

Monotheistic religion based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 B.C.E.–ca. C.E. 30); a faith that grew from obscurity and oppression to become the largest and most influential religion in the premodern Western world. Christianity began as a variant of Judaism, but after Jesus' death it moved rapidly in an original direction. The Christian faith spread slowly throughout the Roman Empire with its adherents suffering persecution intermittently for their beliefs. However, the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine (r. C.E. 306–337) to the faith in the early fourth century C.E. not only helped end the persecution of Christians but also paved the way for the rapid spread of Christianity.

JESUS

Jesus was the son of a Jewish carpenter in the Roman province of Judea, which included the modern-day country of Israel and parts of what is now Jordan. He is believed to have begun preaching publicly at age 30, and his earliest followers were poor fishermen from around the Sea of Galilee who

GREAT LIVES

Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus' recorded concern with and focus on the poorest and least regarded members of society was unusual for the **era** in which he lived. In most ancient societies, a small number of wealthy and powerful individuals wielded near-absolute power over the masses of the poor. Jesus, however, preached that earthly riches were not only unimportant but actually a hindrance to leading an ethical life. He promised the poor that their reward would come in the afterlife and condemned those who were wealthy and powerful on earth for failing to assist those who had less than they did.

Despite his opposition to the existing social order, Jesus rejected violence as a way of bringing about change. He urged his followers to obey Roman law while rejecting the materialistic values that underpinned Roman society. This puzzled and disappointed many of his early followers, who looked to him as the messiah, or promised one, who would free the Jews from Roman domination. However, Jesus stressed that the Kingdom of Heaven he hoped to establish was not an earthly realm, but a social condition in which each person was valued equally and was concerned with the welfare of the group rather than oneself. Jesus thus served as a role model for how to treat other humans with a depth of dignity often lost in daily societal interactions.

came to be known as the apostles. Jesus identified himself as a Jew, and his religious teachings focused on Jewish concepts of moral and ethical behavior.

Jesus, however, broke with Jewish belief and practice in three ways. First, he prophesied about things to come without permission of the Jewish religious leadership. Second, he forgave the sins of the living, which in Jewish tradition only God could do. Third, he promised spiritual salvation for Jews and non-Jews. Some Jews interpreted his message to mean that he would lead them to freedom from their Roman overlords. Thus, they took him for the Messiah, a savior promised in the Hebrew scriptures, who was to lead them out of captivity. However, Jesus did not claim to be the Jewish messiah, but a universal savior. Around C.E. 30, he was arrested in Jerusalem on charges of being a socially disruptive force and was executed on orders from the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate (r. C.E. 26–36). Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead three days later.

ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

Following Jesus' death, his followers spread his message. At first, Christianity retained most of the basic elements of Jewish belief and practice, including the need to observe Jewish dietary laws and the requirement that male adherents be circumcised as a sign of the Jewish covenant with God. These aspects of the faith limited its appeal among Gentiles (non-Jews). A convert named Paul of Tarsus, later canonized by the Catholic Church as Saint Paul, convinced early Christian leaders to abandon their insistence on following Jewish law and practice. This widened the appeal of the faith.

Christians focused their early conversion efforts on the Greek-speaking population of the eastern Mediterranean region, particularly communities in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Most of the earliest Christian communities thus grew up not in Judea but along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and in Asia Minor. Between C.E. 70 and 120, Christian writers recorded the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), four books that each take a slightly different approach to the importance and meaning of Jesus's early ideas.

By the second century C.E., Christianity was firmly rooted in Asia Minor and Judea. Because the Romans allowed subject peoples to worship their own gods as well as Roman deities, Christianity made inroads throughout the Roman Empire. Christianity appealed to the poor because of its

CHRISTIANITY

CA. 4 B.C.E. Jesus of Nazareth born

CA. C.E. 27 Jesus begins his ministry

CA. C.E. 30 Jesus crucified in Jerusalem

CA. C.E. 70–120 Christian writers record the gospels, which detail Jesus's life and teachings

CA. C.E. 100–200 Christianity spreads rapidly throughout Judea and Asia Minor

C.E. 313 Roman Emperor Constantine I issues Edict of Milan ordering toleration of the Christian faith

C.E. 1054 Great Schism; Christianity splits between Roman Catholic Church in the west and Greek Orthodox Church in the east

deemphasis on earthly riches and because it promised the faithful the reward of life after death. It also gained popularity among women, who enjoyed few individual rights under Roman law, because it preached equality of the sexes and allowed women to participate in the rites of the faith. Indeed, women served as the leaders of quite a few early Christian communities. By contrast, the wealthy and powerful were less attracted to Christianity initially.

As the Roman Empire fell into political, social, and economic decline, many citizens began to lose faith in traditional Roman gods and adopted Christianity. The faith grew substantially after Constantine ordered its tolerance in C.E. 313 and later conversion to Christianity. By the time the Western Roman Empire fell in C.E. 476, Christianity had spread throughout the Mediterranean world and into many parts of Europe.

THE GREAT SCHISM

According to the Gospels, Jesus chose one of his followers, Peter, to be the leader of the new church. Peter established the first Christian community in Rome, and his successors as bishops of Rome claimed leadership of Christianity in the first century C.E. However, bishops in the older eastern Christian communities did not recognize the bishop of Rome as the leader of the church. They considered bishops in the East as having older claims to authority. This and other disagreements over rites led to tensions between Rome and the eastern Christian communities.

In C.E. 1054, the bishops of Southwest Asia broke with Rome and established the Eastern or Greek Orthodox Christian Church. While the Roman Catholic Church established authority over Christian communities in Western Europe, the Greek Orthodox Church established itself as the representative of Christianity in Eastern Europe and Southwest Asia. This split, known as the Great Schism, continues to this day.

See also: Bible, Jews and Judaism; Religion.

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Culture and Traditions

The values of the early inhabitants of the Near East and Southwest Asia influenced the development of civilizations throughout much of the ancient world. The early cultures that arose in this region, known as the "cradle of civilization," established standards of social behavior and organization and religious belief and practice that were assimilated by later peoples from as far away as Africa and Western Europe.

TRIBAL CULTURE

Prior to the development of agriculture around 8000 B.C.E., Southwest Asia was populated by small, nomadic, hunter-gatherer tribes. These groups of perhaps 30 closely related individuals depended heavily on one another for survival. Members of the tribe embraced cultural values designed to promote group survival. Those values included the importance of blood ties, protecting family honor, individual responsibility and subordination to the group, and a relatively **egalitarian** tradition of social behavior.

The practices of the Scythians, a Central Asian people who invaded Anatolia in the seventh century B.C.E., were in many ways typical of tribal cultures of the region. The nomadic Scythians maintained a tough code of honor that required honesty and absolute loyalty to the tribe and its leader. The chieftain of the tribe was the ultimate judge of honor and could order the punishment or death of anyone suspected of dishonoring the tribe. However, the head of each family in the tribe was responsible for avenging any assault or dishonorable action taken against the family.

Family and tribal honor were particularly tied to the chastity of women. If a woman was sexually assaulted, both she and her family lost honor until her male relatives avenged the assault. Although men fiercely guarded female relatives' honor, this did not translate into a **patriarchal** view of the role of women in Scythian culture. Scythian men and women dressed similarly, and Scythian women were known to have fought next to men in battle. Even young, unmarried women participated in combat, a development that would be unthinkable in the later urban cultures of the region.

The Scythians were not literate, so little is known of their religious beliefs. Scholars suspect that the Scythians, like most tribal cultures, practiced an **animistic** religion, based on a belief that the world is inhabited by spirits that dwell in natural objects or forces. **Archeologists** have discovered rugs in Scythian tombs depicting Tabiti-Hestia, a goddess associated with fire and wild beasts. Interestingly, this is the only deity found in Scythian art, and it is female.

URBAN CULTURE

The development of agriculture around 8000 B.C.E. led to dramatic cultural changes for the societies of Southwest Asia. Hunting and gathering gave way to settled farming, which provided a larger and more secure source of food. As populations increased, villages in the southern Mesopotamian region of Sumer (now southern Iraq) grew into the world's first cities around 3000 B.C.E. The intimate, kin-centered world of the tribe was replaced by one in which people dealt more often with strangers.

A new urban culture developed in Sumerian cities that incorporated some aspects of tribal tradition, but also evolved to reflect the changing social environment. These **patterns of continuity and change** are evident in both the transition from a nomadic to an urban lifestyle, and in the succession of cultures from the Sumerians to the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians who followed them.

Sumerian Beliefs

The Sumerians' basic cultural beliefs and rituals reflect their awareness of the precarious nature of their civilization, the survival of which depended on agriculture in an arid region with inconsistent

LINK TO PLACE

Sacred Recipes in Ancient Mesopotamia

The earliest written recipes discovered by archeologists come from Mesopotamia and date to the second millennium B.C.E. The oldest collection of recipes consists of three cuneiform tablets from southern Mesopotamia written in the Akkadian language in the seventeenth century B.C.E. Unlike modern recipes, which include instructions for combining ingredients and recommended cooking times, these ancient "recipes" are merely lists of ingredients.

Food historian Eveline van der Steen argues that the recipes found on these tablets were not used for everyday cooking; she and other historians believe they were intended for religious use. According to van der Steen, all of the recipes described in the tablets are different versions of a meat dish served as a ritual meal to a god in his temple. The meal, which probably included bread, beer, and date cakes and other sweets, was placed behind a curtain, where the god would ritually "consume" it. The king ate the "leftovers" not taken by the god. Because these recipes were for meals that probably served a ritual function, the dishes are not considered typical of the food most often consumed by average Mesopotamians. Still, they provide a valuable glimpse into ancient life in the region.

water supplies. The Sumerian (and later Babylonian) New Year festival, Atiku, was the most important occasion of the year. It celebrated the return of spring and the hope for fertility of crops, animals, and humans in the coming season. The festival began on the first new moon after the spring **equinox**, during the Babylonian month of Nisan (March/April). Every city celebrated *Akitu*, but usually on different days, and some celebrated it again during the fall.

The Sumerians associated Atiku with the original birth described in the creation epic known as the *Enuma Elish*, which was recited on the fourth day of the festival. Originally, the hero in this story was the Sumerian god, Enlil. Later cultures placed their own deities in the hero role; in Babylon, the protagonist was Marduk, and among the Assyrians it was the god Assur. In the story, Enlil slays the goddess Tiamat (chaos) and forms the earth and the heavens from her body. He then creates humankind from the flesh of her son, Kingu.

Atiku included sacred marriage rites between the king and the high priestess of each city. This ritual represented a reenactment of the marriage of the goddess of love and war, Inanna, with her husband, Dumuzi. It was based upon a Sumerian myth that attempted to explain the cause of the changing seasons. In the myth, Dumuzi must spend half of the year in the underworld (fall and winter), during which time Inanna grieves so much for him that nature becomes infertile. During the half of the year when Dumuzi is on earth, Inanna is happy and nature is abundant.

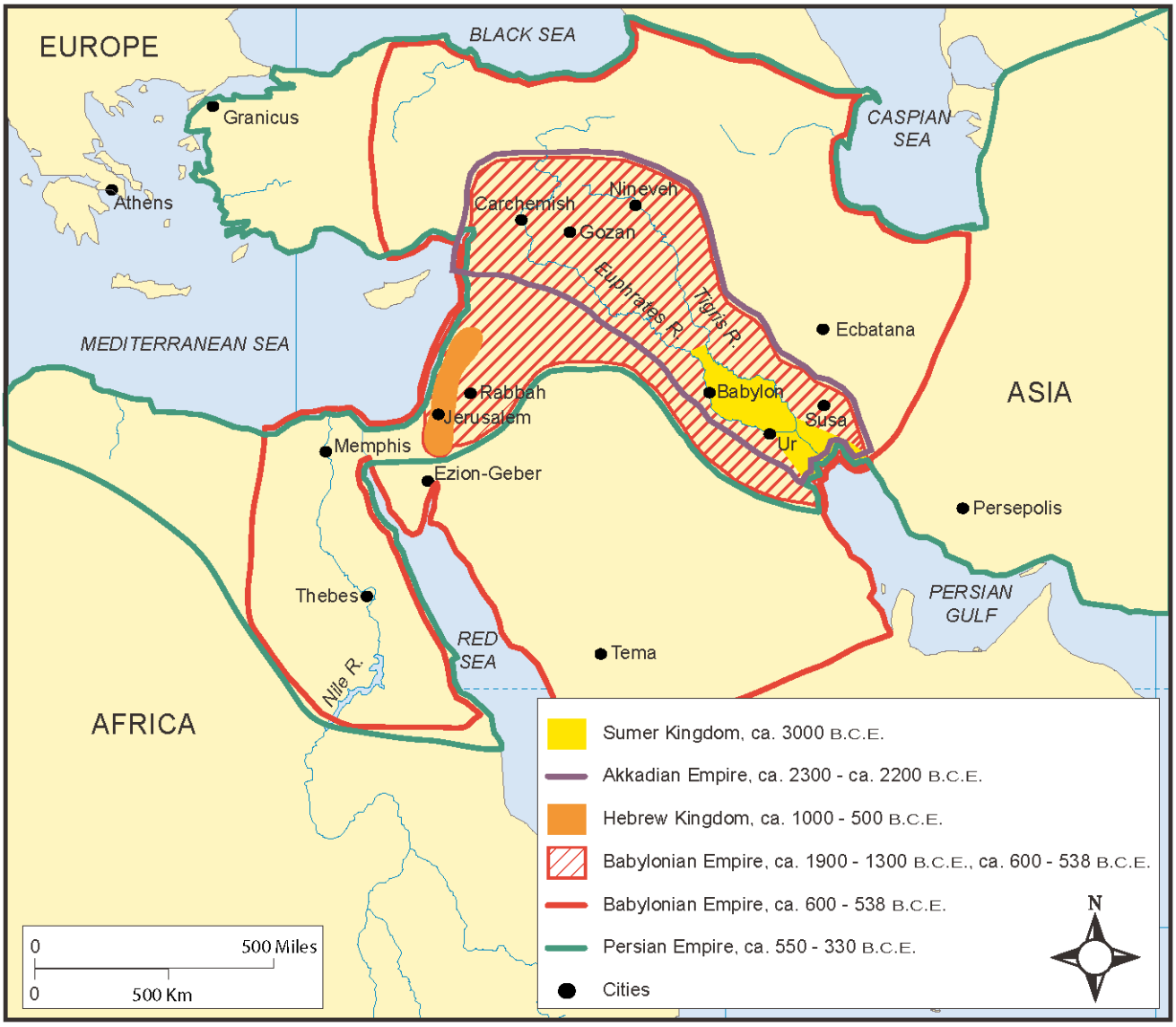
Each month in the Sumerian calendar was dedicated to a different deity, chosen to embody the seasons with which they were associated. The first two months of the new year were named in honor of the original creation deities and mark the rebirth and recreation of society for the coming year. The remaining spring months were dedicated to the fertility goddess and the deities of brewing and flocks and herds. Summer months, when most military campaigns occurred, were named for the goddess of love and war, and the god of justice. Fall months commemorated the harvest god and the deities of hearth and home. The winter months featured festivals to the chooser of the dead and the keeper of the underworld.

Daily Life in Sumer

The average Sumerian was a farmer who worked the fields surrounding the city during the day and retired to houses within the city walls after dark.

MAJOR CULTURAL REGIONS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND SOUTHWEST ASIA, CA. 30,000-300 B.C.E.

Ancient civilizations appeared in the region about 4000 B.C.E., rose and fell, spread new ideas, and engaged in war and trade. Through their interactions, cultures blended with and enriched each other over time. By about 375 B.C.E., the Persians controlled a vast area, reigning over an extremely powerful empire that united much of the region.



Sumerian cities were divided into separate quarters for the upper class, or *amelu*, and the rest of the population. Most Sumerians lived in small, apartment-like houses consisting of one or two rooms that adjoined surrounding dwellings. Each house contained an enclosed courtyard and family chapel where the residents worshipped household gods, as well as a space where deceased family members were buried.

The typical diet consisted of cakes or porridge made from barley, occasionally accompanied by cucumber, onions, or beans, and other vegetables as they came into season. Meat, including beef, veal, and mutton, was more common in the cities than in the countryside, although most Sumerians did not eat it daily. The most common drink was a thick ale brewed from barley; even upper-class Sumerians rarely drank wine.

Music was an important part of Sumerian life and culture, but it apparently was ceremonial in nature and not played simply for enjoyment. Music and dancing typically accompanied Sumerian religious and civic ceremonies, such as wedding, funerals, coronations, or public worship. Musicians would symbolically purify their hands by washing them before playing stringed instruments such as harps or lyres. Many of the songs were dedicated to the Sumerian gods, especially to Inanna.

Babylonian and Assyrian Cultures

The Babylonians displaced the Sumerians as the dominant civilization in southern Mesopotamia about 1900 B.C.E. yet adopted many aspects of Sumerian culture. Like the Sumerians, they spoke the Akkadian language and used the **cuneiform** script. They continued to use the Sumerian calendar and, with the exception of their chief god, Marduk, worshipped traditional Sumerian deities. Even the houses remained in the basic Sumerian style. For most Mesopotamians, daily life under Babylonian rule differed little from life under that of Sumer. Babylonian women enjoyed more freedom than their Sumerian counterparts, but both cultures were strongly patriarchal.

Around 1300 B.C.E., the Babylonians fell to the Assyrians, a closely related people from northern Mesopotamia. The Assyrians also worshipped Sumerian deities and spoke Akkadian. However, unlike the Babylonians, they did not actively promote Sumerian religion or culture among conquered peoples. The Assyrians adopted Aramaic as a common language for their empire, even though the ruling elite continued to speak Akkadian. Subject peoples were allowed to worship local gods, but were also required to acknowledge the existence of a single supreme god, represented on earth by the Assyrian king.

When Babylon finally regained control of the region from Assyria in the seventh century B.C.E., it again attempted to impose the ancient Mesopotamian beliefs and practices on its subjects. After conquering the kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C.E., the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar II (r. 604–562 B.C.E.) dispersed its Jewish inhabitants throughout his empire because they refused to worship Babylonian gods. The so-called Babylonian Exile ended (ca. 538 B.C.E.) only after Persia's conquest of the Babylonian Empire in ca. 539 B.C.E. The last Babylonian king, Nabonidus (r. 556–539 B.C.E.), acknowledged the cultural continuity between his empire and Assyria, referring to the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (r. ca. 680–669 B.C.E.) and Ashurbanipal (r. ca. 669–627 B.C.E.) as his "royal forefathers."

CULTURES OF TOLERATION

The Achaemenid dynasty of Persian kings that conquered Babylonia held significantly different cultural and religious beliefs than did the earlier civilizations of Mesopotamia. The Zoroastrian faith practiced in Persia was based on a cosmic struggle between good and evil, not on the actions of deities associated with the forces of nature. It preached the equality of all humans, regardless of race or sex, as well as a respect for all living things. These values stood in stark contrast to Sumerian and Babylonian approaches to social relations.

Unlike the Babylonians, the Persians did not try to impose their culture on subject peoples. This decision was not only a reflection of their Zoroastrian beliefs, but also a shrewd political calculation. The Persians reasoned that maintaining order over a large and diverse empire would be much easier if subject populations were allowed to practice their own cultures. Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), who toppled the Persian Empire in 330 B.C.E., followed a similar approach that was continued by his successors for the next three centuries.

Alexander introduced to Southwest Asia the **Hellenistic** culture of ancient Greece, which was based on a respect for rational thought and the advancement of human knowledge. Hellenistic society was open to new information, wisdom, and practical experience from foreign cultures. It was also willing to adapt local customs and practices to Greek forms and expressions. It was less accepting of gender equality, however, subjecting females to many of the restrictions experienced by Babylonian women.

By the second century B.C.E., the Romans were beginning to introduce their own variation on Greek

LINK IN TIME

Divination and Prophets

The ancient Mesopotamians believed that they could interpret the will of the gods and, by acting on that knowledge, could please the gods. One method of doing this was to observe the movement of heavenly bodies such as stars and planets, which were considered portents of supernatural and divine events. The Mesopotamians believed that the arrangement of these bodies had a particular meaning that priests could divine. Unusual heavenly occurrences were considered a sign that significant events were about to unfold on earth. These beliefs formed the basis of the practice of astrology. Other methods of divination included examination of bones or the entrails of certain animals, or studying unusual natural phenomena to uncover patterns that would reveal the future.

In the **monotheistic** faiths such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, prophets played a role different from that of diviners and astrologers. These faiths portrayed prophets as wise individuals sent by God in times of crisis to help their people see the will of God and act accordingly. Many of the Hebrew prophets, such as Isaiah, also served as political leaders and were among the most significant historical figures in Judaism. Perhaps the most important Christian prophet was John the Baptist (6 B.C.E.–C.E. 32), who is said to have announced the coming of Jesus as the messiah, or promised savior of the Jewish people. In Islam, Muhammad was believed to be the last of 25 prophets sent by God to communicate his will to humans, and Muhammad's predecessors included both Jewish prophets and Jesus of Nazareth.

culture to Southwest Asia. The Roman Republic that initiated the conquest of the region was based on the concept of equal treatment under the law for all citizens. Subject peoples who willingly accepted Roman rule were offered citizenship, regardless of race or ethnicity—even if they had previously fought against Rome. Like the Persians, Rome's leaders respected the cultural traditions of their subjects, allowing them to practice local customs and religions as long as the Roman gods were honored as well.

Not all the people of the region, however, were willing to accept even this compromise with Roman culture. The refusal of many Jews to sacrifice to Roman gods led to a series of Jewish rebellions against Roman rule during the first and second centuries C.E. The Romans eventually destroyed the city of Jerusalem in C.E. 136 and expelled the Jews from much of the province of Judaea (modern-day Israel and Lebanon), setting off a widespread dispersal of Jewry known as the **Diaspora**.

Over the following two centuries, Roman culture in Asia merged more closely with local cultures. By the time the Roman Empire split into eastern and western halves in the late third century C.E., the eastern portion centered in Asia Minor had developed a distinctive blend of Roman, Greek, and Asian influences known as Byzantine culture that made it quite different from western Roman society.

See also: Archeological Discoveries; Art and Architecture; Babylonia; Mesopotamia; Persia; Religion; Scythians; Society; Sumer; Zoroastrianism.

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Cuneiform *See* Language and Writing.

Darius I, the Great (549–486 B.C.E.)

King who expanded the Persian Empire to its greatest extent and who was noted for his stable and even-handed leadership and highly efficient government. Born into the ruling Achaemenid Dynasty, Darius was a distant cousin of the Persian king Cambyses III (r. ca. 530–522 B.C.E.), who was assassinated by a usurper named Smerdis. Seven months later, Darius led an uprising against Smerdis, deposed him, and took the throne for himself.

The land over which Darius ruled from 522 to 486 B.C.E. extended from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea east to India, north to the Black Sea, and south to Egypt and the Persian Gulf. The region was unstable and Darius faced challenges from the *satraps*, or governors of Persian provinces, as well as from the Babylonians, who, having been subjugated by Persian king Cyrus II in 539 B.C.E., were seeking independence from Persia. Within four months, Darius defeated the Babylonians and subdued the rebellious satraps. He then proceeded to push Persia's territories east to the Indus River and west to Macedonia, in what is now Greece.

Darius, however, was concerned with more than merely conquering territory. He spent his reign reforming the government and introducing a common system of laws, much like that of the Babylonian king Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E.). He increased the number of *satrapies* to 20, thus decreasing the influence of individual governors. He also appointed military governors, tax collectors, and royal inspectors to identify and stamp out government abuse and corruption.

Darius undertook reforms and sponsored civic improvements that promoted commerce and stability. These efforts included creating a currency backed by gold in the imperial treasury, progress that caused merchants and buyers to have greater faith in the marketplace and spurred economic activity. Darius built a road system from the Aegean Sea to the Persian Gulf, which not only facilitated trade but also allowed royal couriers to distribute news and orders faster, and permitted the rapid movement of armies throughout the empire. He also built a great canal joining the Red Sea to the Nile River that enabled ships to move goods more efficiently from one end of the empire to the other.

Darius ruled with a fair but heavy hand. Although a devoted believer in Zoroastrianism, he showed tolerance for other faiths. He allowed the Jews to return to Judah after they had been dispersed throughout the region during the reign of the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar II (r. 604–562 B.C.E.). Darius treated all subjects fairly, taxing them the same as he did the Persians. However, he tolerated no resistance, and defeated rebels

Seen here is the entrance to the tomb of Darius I, the Great, emperor of Persia from 522 to 486 B.C.E. Under Darius' rule, the Persian Empire grew to its greatest extent, stretching from what is now Iran and western Pakistan to Anatolia (modern Turkey) and the Mediterranean coast. (© SEF/Art Resource, NY)

were treated harshly. The leaders were killed, the boys castrated, the girls forced into servitude, the remaining population sold into slavery, and the rebel towns burnt to the ground.

Darius' greatest contribution to the ancient world was providing a model of effective rulership over a large and a diverse empire while creating a politically stable and responsible government. His tolerance and style of governance were models for later conquerors including, ironically, the Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), who would eventually topple the Persian Empire.

See also: Indus River; Persia; Technology and Inventions; Zoroastrianism.

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Ebla

City in northern Syria that exerted a dominant political, economic, and military presence in the ancient Near East during the second and third millennia B.C.E. Ebla experienced two periods of supremacy (ca. 2400–2250 B.C.E. and 1850–1650 B.C.E.) but also faced and fell to external threats from neighboring peoples. At its height, Ebla controlled 17 **city-states** throughout the region and traded with peoples from as far away as Egypt and Sumer.

The history of Ebla is documented in thousands of tablets found during **excavations** at the site in the mid-1960s. The tablets are written in **cuneiform**, a script consisting of **pictographs**—symbols that represent ideas rather than sounds. These tablets included an accounting of state revenues, law cases, diplomatic messages, school texts, and trade records. Some of the tablets were written in Sumerian; others were written in a **Semitic** language similar to Hebrew, known as Eblaite.

The **archeologists** from the University of Rome who excavated Ebla revealed that the city was built on a limestone outcropping and defended by thick surrounding walls and four entry gates. Inside the large "lower city" was a raised citadel, or acropolis, that contained palaces, temples, and other administrative buildings. Archeologists estimate that, at its height, Ebla was home to tens of thousands of people. The land surrounding the city was rich with grains, olives, fruits, and vegetables, as well as good pastureland for livestock.

Ebla was a center of trade in the ancient Near East; its exports included timber and **textiles**. The cuneiform tablets found at the site provide evidence of trade relationships with peoples from as far away as Mesopotamia and Egypt. In addition to exporting and importing products, Ebla was a hub of commercial activity through which goods to and from Persia and Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) were transported.

In the third millennium B.C.E., Ebla rivaled the kingdom of Akkad in Mesopotamia as a major world power. However, around 2250 B.C.E., Naram-Sin, an Akkadian king from Mesopotamia, took credit for being the first to destroy Ebla. This event is documented in an **inscription** found at the city site. Ebla struggled to recover from this defeat and, from 1850 to 1650 B.C.E., the city again was a significant power in the region. During this second high point in Ebla's history, the city's inhabitants were known as Amorites.

Between 1650 and 1600 B.C.E., the Hittites, a people from Anatolia, destroyed Ebla. After the Hittite attack, Ebla dwindled to become a small village that eventually ceased to exist around the twelfth century C.E. The city was abandoned, and nothing remained of it except a mound of sand in the desert, until it was excavated in the twentieth century C.E.

See also: Babylonia; Hittites; Mesopotamia; Sumer.

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Euphrates River

See Fertile Crescent; Mesopotamia.

Fertile Crescent

Crescent-shaped area of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf, covering the areas of modern-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel, and including the Euphrates, Tigris, Nile, and Jordan rivers. The availability of water in the region made possible the development of agriculture, which in turn led to the rise of the world's earliest urban settlements.

The geography and natural resources of the Fertile Crescent provided ideal conditions for the development of human civilization. Unlike neighboring regions in the Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia, there were no significant areas of desert to hinder food production and to provide easy invasion routes

for hostile neighbors. Instead, the region was bordered by mountain ranges that made invasion initially difficult and allowed for the relatively safe growth of human settlements. The annual melting snow packs found in the mountains also served as sources for the largest rivers, whose flooding provided plants with not only life-giving water but also soil rich in nutrients. Among these plants, the most important were the eight founder crops involved in early agriculture: emmer and eckhorn (forms of wheat), barley, flax, chickpeas, peas, bitter vetch, and lentils.

The presence of these foods encouraged hunter-gatherers to settle in the Fertile Crescent around 9000 B.C.E. By about 7000 B.C.E., humans had begun to domesticate many of these plant species and learned agricultural techniques that allowed them to feed the rapidly growing populations. These techniques made farming more efficient, requiring fewer people to grow crops. This freed parts of the population to develop specialized skills such as pottery, weaving, engineering, and astronomy.

Larger populations also led to the rise of a separate ruling class to make and enforce the laws needed to regulate social activity in a more complex, urban environment. A religious elite, which often included the king and other high political officials, emerged at this time as well. This course of development characterized the earliest civilizations in the Fertile Crescent, including the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Phoenicians.

Agriculture was not the only early technology to arise in the Fertile Crescent. In addition to farming, the people of the region developed the wheel in the fifth millennium B.C.E., both for pottery production and transportation. Around 3500 B.C.E., metalworking developed in the region, and by 1600 B.C.E. the first iron tools and implements were created here. The complex commercial transactions brought about by the transformation to an urban society required some form of recordkeeping, which led to the creation of the earliest writing systems. The need to measure and divide land for planting and building spurred the invention of mathematics and engineering in the Fertile Crescent, just as it did in ancient Egypt at about the same time. Close observation of the heavens for religious purposes, as well as to time the planting and harvesting of crops, laid the foundations of astronomy. This great explosion of innovation and creativity also earned the Fertile Crescent a reputation as the cradle of human civilization.

See also: Agriculture; Assyria; Babylonia; Language and Writing; Mesopotamia; Persia; Phoenicians; Sumer.

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Hammurabi (d. 1750)

Sixth king of the Amorite dynasty in Babylon, the southern region of Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Under Hammurabi's leadership, Babylon became the leading city in Mesopotamia and achieved its cultural and political zenith.

During the first three decades of Hammurabi's reign (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E), Babylonia maintained relatively peaceful relations with its neighbors. In his thirtieth year on the throne, Hammurabi repelled an invasion by an eastern people known as the Elamites, then conquered the cities of Sumer and Akkad, incorporating them and the surrounding areas into the Old Babylonian Empire (ca. 2000–1595 B.C.E.). Under Hammurabi, Babylonian control extended from the Mediterranean Sea to what is now western Iran, and from southern Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) to northern Arabia.

Hammurabi is most famous for a unified law code he enacted that applied equally to all groups under his authority. Hammurabi's code was based on the principle of "an eye for an eye" meaning that whatever harm was done to the victim of the crime would be done to the person who harmed them. The 282 laws recorded in **cuneiform** governed all aspects of public and private life in the Babylonian Empire. They provided protection to women and

Dating to the early eighteenth century B.C.E., the Code of Hammurabi is considered the world's earliest written law code that survives today. The imposing black basalt stele, on which the code can be seen, was unearthed at the site of the ancient Persian city of Susa (in modern Iran). It would have been displayed in public to demonstrate the permanence of the written law. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

children, who had no legal standing, and to the elderly, who were among the most vulnerable members of society. The law ensured that professionals took their responsibility to their clients seriously. For example, if a poorly built structure collapsed and killed someone, the builder would be put in a similar structure that was then pulled down, killing him. Thieves had their right hands cut off.

Penalties outlined in Hammurabi's code were based on the social class of the victim and of the offender. If someone from a lower social class harmed someone of a higher class, the penalty was death. If the victim and offender were of the same class, then the same harm done to the victim would be done to the perpetrator. If someone of a higher social class harmed someone of a lower social class, a fine was assessed.

While based on earlier Mesopotamian laws, the importance of the Code of Hammurabi was that it was recorded and displayed in public. Although few Babylonians were literate, the idea of law being literally carved into stone and unchangeable by a willful ruler was a monumental step forward. The code had a clear influence on modern concept of law: permanent, applied consistently, and not subject to change at the whim of the ruler.

See also: Babylonia; Society.

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Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro

The earliest cities in the ancient Indus River valley, in present-day northeast Pakistan, dating from about 3300 to 1600 B.C.E. These cities, along with almost a hundred other settlements located along the course of the Indus River and neighboring rivers, formed the Indus Valley civilization.

Charles Masson, a deserter from the British army, rediscovered the ruins of Harappa in the 1820s. British **archeologist** Sir Alexander Cunningham first formally excavated the site in 1870. Cunningham named the site Harappa after a nearby modern town with that name. A team of Indian archeologists found and excavated the remains of Mohenjo-Daro in the 1920s. Mohenjo-Daro means "Mound of the Dead" in the Sindhi language spoken in the region now.

Harappa, the older of the two settlements, was inhabited from about 3300 to 1600 B.C.E. Mohenjo-Daro, 400 miles (640 km) southwest of Harappa, was occupied about 3000 to 1700 B.C.E. The introduction of irrigation to the Indus River valley around 2600 B.C.E. allowed these settlements to develop into major cities. Scholars estimate that Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa each supported a peak population of 35,000 to 40,000.

CITY PLANNING

These two cities are most notable for the level of civic planning that went into them. They were divided into several sections: the citadel, middle town, and lower town. The citadel was an area enclosed by fortified walls, meant to be a place of refuge both in war and when the Indus River flooded over its banks.

Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were the first cities in ancient Southwest Asia built on a grid pattern with broad, straight streets. They featured sewage systems that allowed human waste and run-off water to be carried out of the cities through drainage ditches. Water was reused and waste was

TURNING POINT

First Planned Cities

The first cities in southwest Asia did not just evolve randomly from the growth of smaller villages and towns into large urban centers—they show evidence of careful planning and organization in response to dangers presented by nature and invaders. At Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, one of the most striking features of each city's layout is how the streets form a grid of square and rectangular blocks.

The violent flooding of the Indus River and its periodic destruction of these cities contributed to the necessity for planning. Each time the cities had to be rebuilt, they were reconstructed exactly as they had been laid out before. In addition to the city blocks, these communities also planned very sophisticated drainage and sewer systems so that their cities would remain as clean as possible, and by healthy places to live. Every home had a latrine and a bathing area, and the run-off from these areas of each home was carefully managed. Water was reused and waste was moved through the sewer into the Indus.

Another important aspect of city planning was location. Not only did the Indus make trade by water cheap, both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro lie at the crossroads of major trade routes. This strategic location of the cities contributed to their growth as centers of trade in the region. By situating themselves so well, the inhabitants of the cities also ensured their economic prosperity and future security. City walls with gates installed at intervals allowed the city to control the traffic of trade and enforce systems of weights and measures uniformly.

There was consistency throughout the city, not only in how the streets were laid out and built, but that each neighborhood had a conveniently located well for fresh water. This attention to detail reveals that having an ordered and organized city was important. It could help create a sense of solidarity and community, and it certainly made living in a metropolis easier and more pleasant. The benefit of planning is clear. These cities had a much longer period of existence under one authority than Mesopotamian cities, such as Ur and Jerusalem, which were continually conquered and lost their importance in the ancient world.

moved through the sewer into the Indus. The elaborate city planning, and the existence of sewer and irrigation systems, suggested highly effective government organization and control. The precise nature and structure of city government, however, remains unknown.

Inhabitants of the cities lived in both private homes and structures that accommodated several families. Private homes had inner courtyards to provide fresh air for ventilation and to isolate the living areas from street noise and dust. From the number of private homes, it is thought there must have been a large middle class that had some role in the government of each city. All buildings were made out of mud bricks baked in kilns or dried in the sun. Wells supplied the neighborhoods with fresh drinking water.

SOCIETY

Another important aspect of city planning in these cities was location. Both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro lie at the crossroads of major trade routes, and both were actively involved in trade with northern and central India, the coastal areas of ancient Persia, and Mesopotamia. Trade goods produced in the cities included beads made from shell and other materials, decorated pottery, tools, and dyed cotton cloth. City walls with gates installed at intervals allowed the city to control the traffic of trade and enforce systems of weights and measures uniformly.

As an outgrowth of trade, Harappans developed an accurate system of weights and measures and a writing system known as the Indus script. Nearly 2,000 clay tablets have been found at the two sites

Unearthed in modern Pakistan, the ancient city of Mohenjo-Daro, along with its sister city, Harappa, was the center of the first settled civilization in the Indus River valley. These cities boasted some of the earliest evidence of civic planning and featured extensive irrigation systems to supply water to their rapidly growing populations. (Borromeo/Art Resource, NY)

containing short **inscriptions** in this script, varying between five and 26 symbols. Although some scholars believe the tablets may have been used to record business transactions, the writings have not yet been translated.

The religious beliefs of the inhabitants of these cities is also unclear. To date, nothing that can be described as a temple or religious center has been uncovered. One of the most famous finds at Mohenjo-Daro is a four-inch-tall (2.5-cm) cast bronze figurine of a dancing female. It is not known if it had a religious meaning or use. Other female figurines with elaborate hairstyles have been found but their significance has yet to be discovered.

DESTRUCTION AND DECLINE

During the course of their existence, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro repeatedly were damaged or destroyed by flooding of the Indus River. However, after each inundation the inhabitants rebuilt on top of the ruins of the old city. Archeologists have found seven distinct levels of this kind of rebuilding at Mohenjo-Daro. At Harappa at least five such levels have been unearthed so far. Each time the cities were rebuilt, they were reconstructed exactly as they had been laid out before. To facilitate rebuilding, the streets were laid out in a regular grid of rectangular and square blocks.

Several theories have been advanced to explain the decline and disappearance of these two cities. The most widely accepted states that a natural disaster so damaged Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro that the residents saw no point in rebuilding and resettling there. Scholars debate the nature of that disaster. Some suggest that a severe flood may have inundated each city. Others believe that the Indus River permanently changed course, either away

from the cities or through them. A third theory proposes that a long-term drought forced the inhabitants to move elsewhere. The fourth argues that the cities were destroyed by an earthquake sometime between 1900 and 1750 B.C.E. Mohenjo-Daro was abandoned by approximately 1700 B.C.E.; the final residents left Harappa perhaps 100 years later.

See also: Indus River; Sumer.

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Hittites

Indo-European people from central Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) who controlled Asia Minor from the eighteenth to the twelfth centuries B.C.E. Hittite history falls into three major **periods**: the Old Hittite Kingdom (ca. 1700–1500 B.C.E.), the Middle Hittite Kingdom (ca. 1500–1430 B.C.E.), and the New Hittite Kingdom or Empire (ca. 1430–1180 B.C.E.).

The first Hittite king whose name appears in the historical record is Hattusilis I (r. ca. 1650–ca. 1620 B.C.E.) who expanded his realm into Syria and conquered Babylon, ending the rule of the descendants of the famed king Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E). Success was short-lived, however, and by 1595 B.C.E., struggles within the ruling family weakened Hittite authority over their vast domains. Some 70 years later, Telipinus (r. ca. 1525–ca. 1500 B.C.E.) assumed the throne and restored order. A proclamation issued by Telipinus is one of the few documents still existing from this period of Hittite history. Beginning in 1430 B.C.E., a series of kings extended the empire to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and south to the Egyptian border.

The Hittites were known for the making and selling of iron tools and weapons, which formed a vital part of their economy. The trade in metal goods brought the Hittites into contact with a wide variety of people from whom they borrowed elements of other people's cultures. For example, although they spoke a native tongue, tablets uncovered at Bogazkoy in modern-day Turkey in 1905 revealed that the Hittites wrote in Akkadian **cuneiform**. The Hittites adopted much of Babylonian culture, including King Hammurabi's Code of Law, as well as the idea of a king who was both warrior and high priest. They accepted the Babylonian gods but, unlike the Babylonians, were tolerant of other faiths. The Hittites allowed their subjects to worship the gods of their own choosing, and conquered peoples were allowed to keep their own cultural practices and languages.

Control over trade routes and sources of metal ores eventually led to conflict between Hittite and Egyptian rulers. In 1274 B.C.E., Egyptian forces under Rameses II, the Great (r. ca. 1279–ca. 1213 B.C.E.), met the Hittite army of Muwatallis (1320–1294 B.C.E.) in the largest chariot battle to date at Kadesh on the Orontes River, in modern-day Syria. The result was a draw, but the cost of the wars and the loss of manpower weakened both sides significantly. The Hittite Empire was left vulnerable by the Egyptian campaign and by struggles for the throne within the ruling family. In 1193 B.C.E., a groups of invaders known as the Sea Peoples attacked a militarily overextended and financially exhausted Hittite Empire. By 1180 B.C.E., the empire had ceased to exist, but small, independent

kingdoms built on the ruins of the empire continued until about 700 B.C.E.

See also: Assyria; Babylonia; Tools and Weapons.

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I

Indus River

Major river of Southwest Asia that served as the cradle of one of the world's earliest and largest civilizations. The name "Indus" is derived from the Sanskrit word *sindhu*, which means "large body of water." The peoples who lived in the Indus Valley came to be known as "Hindus," based on a Persian mispronunciation of the Sanskrit word. The river also gave its name to the land of India.

The Indus flows south from the Himalayan Mountains in Tibet through present-day India and Pakistan, to the Arabian Sea, a distance of about 2,000 miles (3,200 km). The glacial melt from the Himalaya Mountains feeds the Indus River, which provides a significant water source for the plains and otherwise arid lands surrounding it. This allowed farming to thrive in the region and more than 1,000 settlements, villages, and cities to be established along its banks. Irrigation was introduced about 2600 B.C.E. and later expanded under the Kushan Empire (ca. C.E. 1–250) and Mughal Empire (C.E. 1526–1707).

Although the river made civilization possible in the Indus Valley, it could also be destructive. The Indus experiences a rare geographical event called a tidal bore, which is a surge of water from the ocean traveling up the river, against the normal flow of the current. The tidal bore is basically a tidal wave that causes the levels of water to rise and fall dramatically. In addition, during the monsoon season between July and September, so much rain falls that the Indus River floods, causing widespread damage to fields and housing, and often resulting in large loss of life. This flooding is so severe that two major cities of the ancient Indus Valley civilization, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, had to be rebuilt several times.

The Indus River also functioned as a culturally unifying force. The flow of the Indus through the northern Indian region helped to promote communication and cultural exchange among the diverse groups living along its course. In contrast, southern Indian populations lived in isolated hillside and mountain communities, not united by a common river system, a situation that encouraged greater cultural diversity and mistrust of outsiders. Politically and militarily, the Indus River served as a natural boundary between the regions of ancient India and those territories now known as Afghanistan and Iran. This offered the inhabitants of the Indus Valley some protection from invaders from those regions. However, since the river flowed south into the Arabian Sea, it facilitated invasion from the south and west. For example, in 326 B.C.E., the Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), rafted his army up the river to attack Indian cities.

See also: Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro; Monsoons.

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Irrigation

See Agriculture; Technology and Inventions.

Islam

Monotheistic religion founded by the prophet Muhammad (C.E. 570–632) between C.E. 610 and 613 in what is now Saudi Arabia. The Arabic word *islam* means "submission," referring to adherents' surrender to the will of God. Followers of Islam are called Muslims and their sacred text is the Koran ("the reading"). Muslims believe that the Koran is the word of God as delivered by the archangel Gabriel to Muhammad.

MUHAMMAD

Muhammad was 40 years old when he received his first religious revelation. He began teaching his family and friends the beliefs that were revealed to him, and in time many in Mecca converted to Islam and turned to Muhammad as both a political and religious leader. This brought him into conflict with the leaders of Mecca, who turned increasingly violent against him. In C.E. 622, Muhammad and his followers moved to Yathrib, approximately 200 miles (320 km) northeast of Mecca. This move, called the Hejira, is the starting date for the Islamic calendar.

The community of Yathrib subsequently converted to Islam and took the name Medina ("city of the prophet"). By C.E. 630, Muhammad was the religious, political, and military leader of Medina, Mecca, and the area in between. After his death in C.E. 632, his political and military roles were taken on by his best friend and father-in-law, Abu Bakr (r. C.E. 632–634). By this time, the entire Arabian Peninsula was under Islamic rule.

ISLAMIC BELIEFS

As Muhammad had taught his earliest followers, Muslims worship a single all-powerful God named Allah who they believe created the world. They believe that messengers or prophets throughout history have delivered the word of God to humankind. The prophets of Islam include many of the Hebrew **patriarchs**, such as Abraham (the legendary ancestor of both Jews and Arabs and to whom the Islam religion traces its roots) and Moses (thought of as the founder of Judaism), as well as Jesus of Nazareth. Muslims claim that the line of prophets ended with Muhammad, whom they consider the greatest of all the prophets.

The basic tenets of the Muslim faith are contained in the Koran, whose verses, according to legend, Muhammad recited to scribes while in a religious trance. The main religious duties of a devout Muslim are called the Five Pillars of Islam. The first pillar is recitation of the affirmation of faith, or *shahadah*: "There is no god but God (Allah) and Muhammad is the messenger of God." The second pillar is engaging in prayer five times each day, with a special sixth prayer on Friday. Prayer can be performed individually or in groups. The third pillar is fasting from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan in order to purify the body and redirect one's focus back to god. Muslims may

GREAT LIVES

Muhammad

At the time that Muhammad (C.E. 570–632) received his first spiritual revelation, he was a successful businessman with a wife and five children. Although he had fared well under the Arab tribal leaders who held power in the Arabian Peninsula, he was deeply troubled about the direction of Arab society. The ruling families seemed to govern without a sense of social obligation or desire to create unity. The poor, sick, and old were allowed to suffer alone. Caravan owners raided one another's camel trains. Revenge killings by one family against another for real or perceived crimes lasted for generations. Rather than trying to end such violence, the tribal leaders deliberately created distrust between various social factions to prevent them from uniting and overthrowing the established political order.

It was in this context between C.E. 610 and 613 that Muhammad received the word of God. Muhammad began to speak of his beliefs in public, emphasizing the common humanity of all peoples, Arab and non-Arab. He argued that members of the community should be responsible for looking after one another; that the sick were everyone's responsibility; and that no one should turn away from a beggar. He taught that one's skin color, social class, or gender is unimportant; an individual's devotion to becoming the person Allah intended him or her to be is what truly matters.

In a period of roughly 20 years, Muhammad changed the society in which he lived. During his lifetime, he and his followers created a community in which men, women, former slaves, city-dwellers, and nomads had equal treatment under the law. It was a society in which women could inherit property and husbands could not beat their wives. At a time when Christians were fighting amongst themselves to control petty kingdoms in Europe, Muhammad's life and teachings guided Muslims of different races toward spiritual, social, and cultural unity.

only drink water during the day and may eat only after sunset. During this month, a Muslim must also abstain from harmful actions and speech, as well as sexual relations. The fourth pillar is the giving of alms to the poor. The fifth pillar is the obligation to make a pilgrimage to the sacred site of Mecca at least once during one's lifetime. Other Islamic recommendations and proscriptions are found in *shari'ah*, Islamic law; *sunnah*, customary law; and *haddiths*, verified statements and actions of Muhammad.

SPREAD OF ISLAM

In the century following Muhammad's death, Islam spread rapidly through trade networks, conversion, and military conquest. From the Arabian Peninsula, it spread west into North Africa and across the Strait of Gibraltar into Iberia (modern-day Spain and Portugal). It also expanded northward through the Eastern Mediterranean and eventually as far as Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and east to what are now Pakistan and Afghanistan. This first phase of aggressive expansion occurred under the Umayyad Dynasty (C.E. 661–750), descendants of Muhammad, whose capital was in Damascus, in modern-day Syria.

The expansion and conversion of non-Arab populations by the Umayyads antagonized more traditional Arab Muslims. These conservative groups supported a rival faction, the Abbasids, who overthrew the Umayyads in C.E. 750 and established their own dynasty, centered in Baghdad. The sole remaining line of Umayyad rulers continued to wield power in Iberia until C.E. 1492. The Abbasids turned away from territorial expansion and focused on establishing firm control over their domains. Nevertheless, they were unable to stop an invasion by Mongols from Central Asia in the mid-thirteenth century C.E.: they sacked Baghdad and brought an end to the Abbasid Dynasty in C.E. 1258.

RISE OF ISLAM

C.E. 610–613 Muhammad received first revelations and begins preaching Islam in Arabian Peninsula

C.E. 622 Muhammad and followers leave Mecca for the city Yathrib (later Medina); this event, called the *Hejira*, marks the start of the Islamic calendar

C.E. 630 Muhammad returns to Mecca as political and spiritual leader of Islam

C.E. 632 Death of Muhammad; Arabian Peninsula under Islamic rule

C.E. 661–750 Umayyad Dynasty expands territory under Islamic rule from Arabia throughout Southwest Asia and into North Africa, India, and Iberia (modern-day Spain and Portugal)

C.E. 750–1258 Abbasid Dynasty assumes leadership of Islamic Empire

C.E. CA. 1100 Islam spreads to Indonesia

C.E. 1210–1526 Islamic Delhi sultanate rules in India

C.E. 1258 Mongols sack Baghdad, bringing end to Abbasid Dynasty

C.E. 1492 Last Muslims expelled from Spain

C.E. 1526–1707 Islamic Mughal Empire succeeds Delhi Sultanate in India

Whereas Arab armies brought Islam to Africa and the Middle East, Arab Muslim merchants were the primary agents of Islam in India. Indian merchants in the state of Kerala on the Malabar Coast of Southeast India were the first to convert. The first Indian mosque, or religious building, was built in C.E. 642 in Kasargod, Kerala. Islamic rulers eventually came to power in India, most notably the Delhi Sultanate (C.E. 1210–1526) and the Mughal Empire (C.E. 1526–1707). By the twelfth century, Islam spread east from India to what is now Indonesia.

See also: Christianity; Religion.

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J

Jerusalem

City in central Israel considered holy by the world's three major **monotheistic** faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Originally a Canaanite settlement founded in the second millennium B.C.E., Jerusalem became the capital of the united Kingdom of Israel around 1000 B.C.E. The Hebrew king Solomon (r. ca. 970–ca. 930 B.C.E.) furthered the expansion of the city by encouraging the nomadic tribes of Israel to establish permanent urban residence there. Solomon built administrative and judicial centers in Jerusalem, and constructed the First Temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, a chest that purportedly held the pieces of the Ten Commandments.

After Solomon's death, the Kingdom of Israel split into two states—the Northern Kingdom of Israel with its capital at Shechem, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which maintained Jerusalem as its capital. In the eighth century B.C.E., the Babylonians invaded the northern kingdom, gradually conquering pieces of its territory until the last Israeli stronghold fell in 722 B.C.E. The southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar II (r. 604–562 B.C.E.) in 597 B.C.E. and was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. Local religious and political resistance led the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem's city walls and Solomon's temple and to deport its leading citizens to elsewhere in the Babylonian Empire. After conquering the Babylonians in 539 B.C.E., King Cyrus II, the Great, of Persia (r. ca. 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.) allowed the Jews to return to Judah. With the end of the so-called Babylonian Exile, a new Second Temple was founded in Jerusalem, which regained its status as the spiritual center of Judaism.

Until the twentieth century C.E., Jerusalem remained in the hands of various foreign conquerors, including the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantine Empire, and a number of Muslim dynasties. Because the city's Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other shrines are located on what is believed to be the site of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 B.C.E.–ca. C.E. 30), it is a holy site for Christians and a pilgrimage destination. The Al-Aqsa Mosque on Temple Mount, dating to C.E. 647, was built on the spot where Muslims believe Muhammad ascended to heaven for a single night to talk to Moses and Abraham. Thus, Muslims also consider Jerusalem sacred ground. Its religious importance among the three major faiths has made it a focus of religious warfare. In C.E. 1099, Crusaders from Christian western Europe captured Jerusalem and established a Christian kingdom there. It lasted only until C.E. 1247.

See also: Assyria; Christianity; Islam; Jews and Judaism; Persia; Religion.

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Jews and Judaism

Name given to a **monotheistic** religion that began in ancient Southwest Asia about 1800 B.C.E., and its adherents. The word *Jew* is derived from the name of the ancient Hebrew Kingdom of Judah, which existed from the tenth to the sixth centuries B.C.E.

According to the Hebrew Bible, scriptures referred to by Christians as the Old Testament, the roots of Judaism lie in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur, in what is now Iraq. A citizen of Ur named Abraham is considered the first Jew because he was the first person to submit to the will of the Hebrew god, Yahweh. According to the book of Genesis, Yahweh established a covenant, or agreement, with Abraham which promised that Abraham and his descendents would prosper as long as they kept faith with Yahweh.

At Yahweh's direction, Abraham moved his peo-

GREAT LIVES

Abraham

Abraham (born ca. 1800 B.C.E.) holds a unique place in religious history. He is revered in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and is mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Bible, and the Koran. In the modern world, he is seen as the vital connecting thread among the three major **monotheistic** faiths. Because Abraham's life has deep meaning in these faiths, they are called Abrahamic faiths.

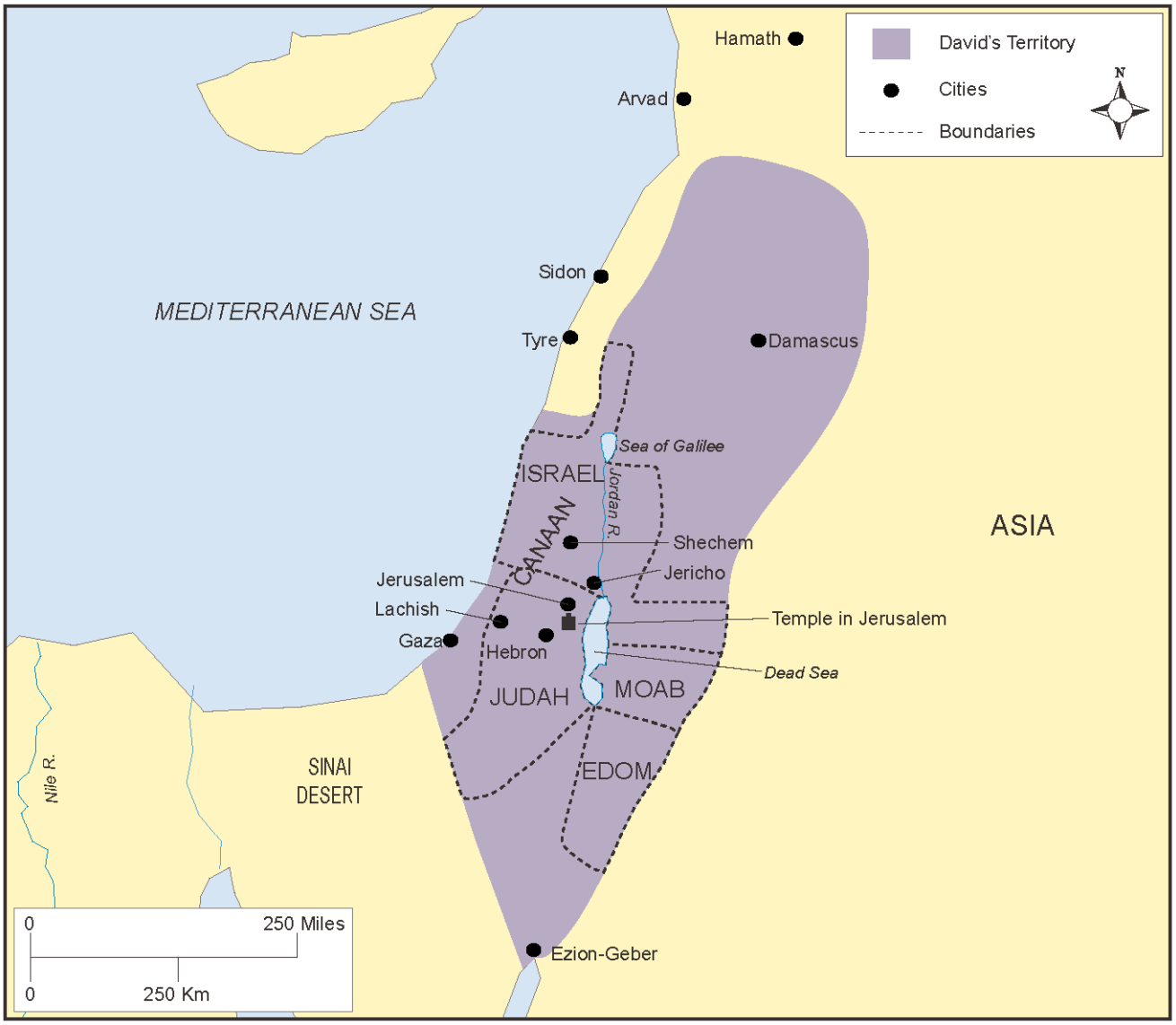
In Judaism, Abraham was the first to believe in the single all-powerful god named Yahweh. His faith in Yahweh led Abraham to abandon his ancestors, beliefs and leave his home to worship his god. As the first to enter into the covenant with Yahweh, Abraham is considered the father of the people who became the Jews. In Jewish tradition, the near sacrifice of his second son, Isaac, was one of 10 tests Abraham underwent to see if he and his descendants were worthy of entering into the covenant.

Christians revere Abraham as the first man to believe in Yahweh, whom they consider one of the three aspects of God, and because he provides a model for the kind of absolute faith later demonstrated by Jesus and his followers. Saint Paul (C.E. ca. 3–ca. 67), a key figure in the early spread of Christianity, often held up Abraham as a model of faith in the absence of evidence. Christians often see Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as foreshadowing the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

In Islam, Abraham, or Ibrahim, was a "god-seeker" or prophet, a person who is sent to deliver god's message to humanity. Abraham is often likened to the prophet Muhammad, who first preached Islam, because both faced the difficult task of introducing a new understanding of God to a disbelieving people. In the Koran, Isaac's brother Ishmael is almost sacrificed to prove Abraham's faith. Because Ismail traditionally is considered the father of the Arabic people, Muslims revere both Ishmael and his father, Abraham.

ISRAEL IN THE TIME OF KING DAVID, CA. 1010–970 B.C.E.

King David, the second king of ancient Judah and Israel, revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, unified the 12 ancient Israelite tribes to form a powerful territory.



ple to Canaan, a region lying along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. In the eighteenth century B.C.E., Jews migrated from Canaan into Egypt. The Bible records that the Egyptians eventually turned against and enslaved the Jews. According to the book of Exodus, Yahweh sent a series of plagues upon Egypt that convinced the Egyptian pharaoh to allow the Jews to leave Egypt to seek a land of their own. Historians and **archeologists** debate the accuracy of the biblical account, noting that no evidence of such a large-scale migration appears in either Egyptian histories or the archeological record.

Regardless of the historical accuracy of the account, Jews regard the exodus as a key moment in their history. Led by a lawgiver and prophet named Moses, the Jews are said to have wandered in the Sinai Desert for 40 years in search of a new home.

The Western Wall, one of the holiest sites in Judaism, is comprised of the remains of the Second Jewish Temple, destroyed by the Romans in C.E. 70. The wall stands in modern-day Israel in the city of Jerusalem, which is sacred to the three major monotheistic faiths that originated in Southwest Asia: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (Gary Cralle/ The Image Bank/ Getty Images)

While on this journey, Moses is reported to have received from Yahweh the Ten Commandments, which form the basic moral and religious obligations for Jews. Around 1200 B.C.E., the nomadic Jews reentered Canaan. They encountered many smaller groups, but there was no major power in the region to keep the Jews from claiming some of the land.

ANCIENT ISRAEL

The Jews were organized into 12 independent tribes that formed a loose confederation, or military alliance, for mutual protection. Around 1024 B.C.E., the Jews united under the first king of ancient Israel, Saul, who secured the borders of the new kingdom. Saul is said to have been succeeded

TURNING POINT

The Difficulties of Monotheism

Monotheism is the worship of a single god, instead of many different gods. Three monotheistic religions emerged in **antiquity** that changed the spiritual landscape of the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although the basic ideas of each faith vary, their followers worship a single, all-powerful god who they believe created the universe. This was a radical shift from the **polytheistic** religions of antiquity in which the gods played many roles.

The shift from polytheism to monotheism was not easy spiritually. People worshiping multiple gods could appeal to several different deities if one failed to respond to prayers or sacrifices. Worshiping a single god meant putting all of one's faith and trust in a single deity. To many, this notion seemed illogical and somewhat frightening. In some cases, fear and misunderstanding led to mistrust and persecution of members of monotheistic faiths.

Jews suffered persecution for their beliefs after being conquered by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. The Jewish inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom of Judah, in what is now Israel, refused to honor Babylonian gods and were exiled throughout the Babylonian Empire. The so-called Babylonian Exile ended in ca. 538 B.C.E., after the Persian conquest of Babylonia.

Christians living in the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries C.E. also faced official and unofficial persecution. Unlike the Babylonians, the Romans did not force subject peoples to abandon their own faiths, but they did require their subjects to make annual sacrifices to the Roman state gods. Like the Jews, however, Christians refused to worship other gods. Roman officials, as well as many average citizens, considered this attitude anti-Roman and came to view Christians as a threat to Rome.

by his son-in-law, David (r. ca. 1000–ca. 961 B.C.E.). Although David is one of the best-known figures in the Bible, there is debate as to whether he existed. The biblical David is given credit for expanding the borders of Israel and for building Jerusalem into an important capital. The third Jewish king, Solomon (r. ca. 970–ca. 930 B.C.E.), built the First Temple in Jerusalem and attempted to form the Jews into a unified people by breaking the old bonds of tribal allegiance. This meant breaking the authority of the tribal leaders, who resisted Solomon's polices.

Following Solomon's death, 10 of the tribes broke away and formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They rejected a strong centralized government, which left them vulnerable to attack. In the eighth century B.C.E., the Assyrians began a conquest of each of the tribes, and by 722 B.C.E. all of Northern Israel had fallen.

The remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which together formed the southern Kingdom of Judah, held off the Assyrians but were conquered by the Babylonian Empire in 586 B.C.E. When the Jews refused to worship Babylonian gods, the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple, burned Jerusalem, and forcibly deported 10,000 prominent Jews to distant parts of the Babylonian Empire. This exile of Jews is known as the Babylonian Diaspora.

In 539 B.C.E., the Persians conquered the Babylonians and the following year they allowed the exiled Jews to return to Judah. The Persians, who were more tolerant than their predecessors, permitted the practice of Judaism and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. In 330 B.C.E., the Persian Empire fell to the Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), and Judah became part of the **Hellenistic** world. Alexander's empire crumbled soon after his death, and the Jews came under the control of the Seleucid Empire that subsequently arose in Babylon. In 165 B.C.E., a Jewish group named the Maccabees led a successful revolt against the Seleucids and established an independent Kingdom of Judah. The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah celebrates this victory.

The Roman Empire conquered the Maccabees' kingdom in 63 B.C.E. but had great difficulty maintaining order. Judah's population resisted Roman occupation, staging three large-scale revolts against Roman rule. The last of these resulted in the Roman devastation of Judah in C.E. 135 and the expulsion of large numbers of Jews from the region. This forced a centuries-long dispersal of Jews called the **Diaspora**, sending them to other regions of the Near East and Europe. This dispersal ended only with the establishment of the modern-day state of Israel in C.E. 1948.

LAW AND CUSTOM

The first five books of the Jewish scriptures comprise the Torah, the most sacred of Jewish texts. The Torah lays out Jewish religious law and describes acceptable social and dietary practices. The rest of the Hebrew Bible consists of books of wisdom, history, prophecy, law, and psalms. These writings constitute a history of the Jewish people and explain what God expects from them in terms of moral and ethical behavior. Jewish law is meant to provide moral and ethical guidelines for how to act toward God and toward other humans. It is concerned primarily with human relationships, not with property rights, and states that all humans regardless of sex or race are to be treated with respect, dignity, and equality.

The Jewish ideals of respect and dignity for humankind, monotheism, individual responsibility, and expectations of moral and ethical behavior influenced other religions in ancient Southwest Asia. Other faiths that arose in the region claim kinship with Judaism, preserving many of the same principles and revering many of the same figures. Christianity, for example, began as a sect of Judaism and maintained its concept of the human relationship with God and the individual's responsibility to take morally right actions. Islam is also tightly interwoven with Judaism's early history. Muslims believe that the prophet Muhammad was a direct descendant of Abraham through his son Ishmael, and they too accept Moses as a prophet.

See also: Assyria; Babylonia; Bible; Christianity; Islam; Jerusalem; Religion; Ur.

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L

Language and Writing

Southwest Asia was one of two areas—ancient Egypt being the other—in which written language developed independently some time after 3000 B.C.E. Scholars speculate that these early civilizations originally developed writing as a way to record commercial transactions. Eventually, its use spread to include the recording of tax records, political and legal declarations, religious rituals and beliefs, the achievements of rulers, and literature.

SPOKEN LANGUAGES

Ancient spoken languages in the regions of Mesopotamia, Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), and the Indus River Valley are divided into two distinct groups: **Semitic** and Indo-European. The Semitic language group includes Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Persian (or Farsi). These languages share many similarities in grammar, although they developed different pronunciations and vocabularies because of the physical separation of the various groups that spoke them. Numerous waves of human migration spread Semitic languages from Africa across the Arabian Peninsula between 3000 and 2500 B.C.E.

The Indo-European languages were and are still spoken primarily in Europe, India, and parts of Southwest Asia. They include English, German, Celtic, Hindi, and Indo-Iranian. Many **linguists** and **archeologists** interpret the presence of Indo-European languages in Southwest Asia as a sign of invasion or migration by peoples from the Caucasus and southern Russia into the Indus River valley. This wave of migration occurred sometime around 3000 B.C.E., and later spread into the areas of modern-day Iran and Afghanistan.

WRITING SYSTEMS

Around 3100 B.C.E., the Sumerians developed the **cuneiform** script, a form of writing that used **pictographs**, symbols that stood for individual things or ideas. Early cuneiform employed ideograms, symbols that looked like the items they represented. Over time, the symbols became more abstract and looked increasingly less like the things they represented. Cuneiform was a difficult writing system to learn because mastering it required a working knowledge of between 500 and 1,000 symbols.

To record the symbols, Sumerians pressed a thin wooden stick with a slanted end into a wet clay tablet. The tablet was then dried either in the sun or in a kiln, or oven. Clay was used because it was plentiful along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The tablets, which came in a variety of shapes, including cones or rectangular sheets of clay, bore lines to separate the rows of writing. Corrections could be made to the tablets while still

This clay tablet from Achaemenid Persia contains cuneiform writing from about 500 B.C.E. Tablets such as these were used to record administrative details of the Persian government, such as the daily rations distributed to workers, which provide scholars with original sources of information about the workings of the Persian Empire. (Behrouz Mehri/AFP/Getty Images)

wet, but it was not possible to alter texts once the clay had hardened.

Because it took time to learn to read and write, literacy was a skill developed by only a tiny fraction of early Mesopotamians. The sons of wealthy families, who were destined to enter government service or become priests, were most likely to learn cuneiform. A small number of commoners became independent scribes, writing contracts for merchants and farmers and recording the decrees of the ruling and priestly classes.

Documents and **inscriptions** excavated from ancient sites in Mesopotamia illustrate some of the non-commercial reasons for the development of writing. For example, putting laws in written form gave concrete expression to the rights and obligations of subjects as well as of their rulers. A written law code made it more difficult for rulers to act in an arbitrary fashion. It also specified the extent of a ruler's power as the gods' representative on earth, and specified the range of rulers' authority over their subjects. The oldest surviving fragments of law codes come from the reign of Ur-Nammu, King of Ur (r. ca. 2065–ca. 2047 B.C.E.). This code was highly evolved and clearly based on older law codes that are now considered lost. The oldest complete law code is the Code of Hammurabi, complied around 1786 B.C.E.

Writing also allowed rulers to preserve their names and achievements to gain a sort of immortality through the historical record. The best example of writing to proclaim a ruler's greatness was found in what is now Iraq. It is called the *Behistun Inscription* and dates to about 515 B.C.E. The Persian king Darius I (r. 522–486 B.C.E.) ordered it to be inscribed

LINK IN TIME

Parallel Creation Stories

A comparison of the biblical book of Genesis to the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* reveals a host of elements that suggest both works shared a common origin. Written copies of the Sumerian epic date to about 2100–2000 B.C.E., while the earliest written version of Genesis is thought to date to about 1000 B.C.E.

Parallels between the texts appear at the very beginning of each story. In both, humans are created from clay or dust. In Genesis, when Eve eats of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, she and Adam gain self-awareness. In *Gilgamesh*, it is a woman who gives consciousness to the wild man Enkidu, who enters into civilization and becomes Gilgamesh's companion. A serpent in both tales is the cause of humankind's fall. In Genesis, it is the serpent who tempts Eve to eat the apple that results in her and Adam's banishment from Eden. In *Gilgamesh*, a serpent eats the plant that Gilgamesh must consume in order to achieve immortality. Genesis famously features the story of Noah, who, warned by God, builds an ark to survive a flood sent to punish humans for their wickedness. *Gilgamesh* tells of Utnapishtim and his wife, who are warned about a great flood and survive by building a boat.

Several of these common elements reflect cultural beliefs that were shaped by the environments of the societies that created the stories. For example, in a desert environment where many snakes are poisonous, the serpent is frequently looked upon as a bringer of death or misfortune. The flood is another typical symbol of destruction or calamity in regions such as Mesopotamia, where floods are frequent occurrences. Some of the stories may even reflect historical knowledge. It is possible that the story of the great flood was a memory of an actual event in the region that became mythologized and handed down through oral and, later, written tradition.

more than 300 feet (91 m) up on the face of a cliff at the frontier of the Persian Empire. In it, Darius proclaimed his victory against a dozen major enemies and his blessing by the gods.

Another major function of writing was to record religious concepts that began as orally transmitted stories. The most important of these works are the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, written around 1800 B.C.E., and the *Enuma Elish*, composed about 1700 B.C.E. Both present Sumerian understandings of how and why humankind was created and what humans could expect in this life and afterwards.

EVOLUTION OF THE ALPHABET

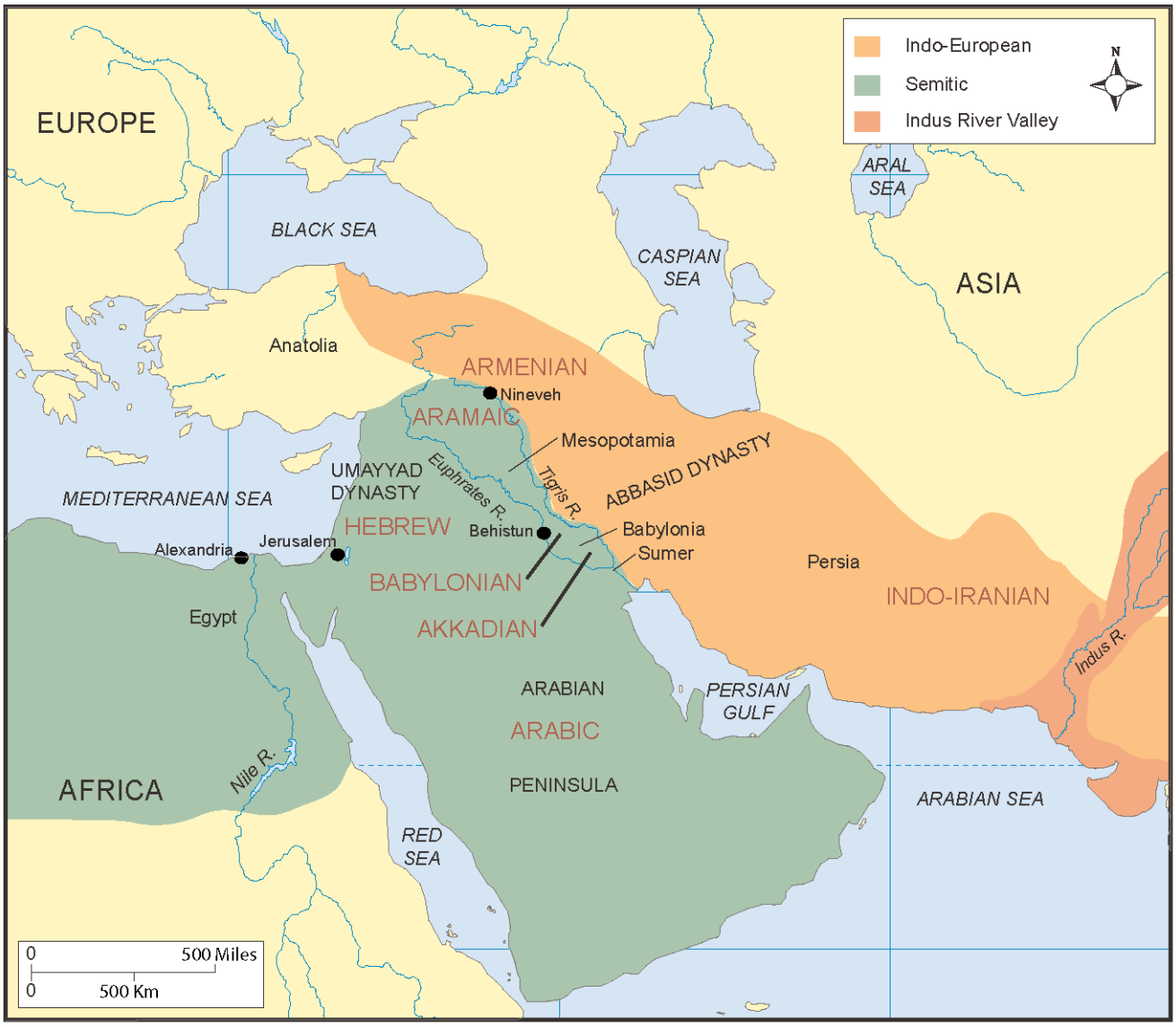
Because cuneiform was not based on the sounds of a particular language, the illiterate conquerors of Sumer, including the Akkadians and Babylonians, adopted the writing system to record their own languages. It continued to be used for scientific texts in the region until the beginning of the Common Era. However, for everyday commercial transactions and wider government and literary uses, cuneiform eventually gave way to more simplified systems of writing.

Between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E., the Phoenicians, a people living along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, developed a system of writing that was simpler to learn and write and that could be mastered fairly quickly. The Phoenician alphabet was based on 22 symbols or letters, each of which represented a specific sound. This meant that any word, Phoenician or foreign, could be recorded in this new writing system by using the letters in the correct combination. This was of particular importance to the Phoenicians, who developed an extensive trade network throughout the Mediterranean. The Phoenician alphabet greatly facilitated communication and recordkeeping because it could be used not only by the Phoenicians but also by their trading partners.

This simplified system of writing appealed to many of the Phoenicians' trading partners, including

MAJOR LINGUISTIC GROUPS

Southwest Asia's languages fall into two groups, Semitic and Indo-European. Semitic languages include Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Persian (Farsi). Several waves of migration spread Semitic languages from Africa across the Arabian Peninsula between 3000 and 2500 B.C.E. The Indo-European languages include English, German, Celtic, Hindi, Armenian, and Indo-Iranian. Many linguists and archeologists believe Indo-European languages came to Southwest Asia with peoples invading or migrating from the Caucasus and southern Russia. Indo-European languages appeared in the Indus River Valley some time around 3000 B.C.E., and later spread into what are now Iran and Afghanistan.



the Hebrews and the Arabs. The Greeks adopted it around 800 B.C.E., and they, in turn, introduced it to the Etruscans and Romans who were living in the Italian Peninsula. As the Roman state expanded across Europe, North Africa, and the ancient Middle East, they brought the Phoenician alphabet with them. By the time of the collapse of the western Roman Empire in C.E. 476, the Phoenician alphabet had become the standard script throughout most of the Western world.

Spread of Literacy

For most of history, the ability to read and write was the province of a few select individuals, usually the

LANGUAGE AND WRITING

CA. 3100 B.C.E. Ancient Mesopotamians develop the earliest written script, cuneiform, which uses symbols to represent objects and ideas

CA. 3000 B.C.E. Speakers of Indo-European languages migrate from Caucasus and southern Russia to Middle East and Indus River valley

CA. 3000–2500 B.C.E. Semitic languages spread from Africa across Arabian Peninsula

CA. 1800 B.C.E. *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Sumerian poem considered the earliest known work of literature, written down

CA. 1786 B.C.E. Code of Hammurabi, oldest law code still in tact today, recorded in Babylonia

CA. 1700 B.C.E. *Enuma Elish*, early Babylonian creation myth, composed

CA. 1400–1200 B.C.E. The Phoenicians, a people living along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, develop phonetic alphabet

CA. 800 B.C.E. Greeks adopt Phoenician alphabet and introduce it to Europe

515 B.C.E. Date of the Behistun Inscription, carved into the cliffs above the oasis at Behistun, in modern-day Iran, recording the military achievements of the Persian King Darius I, the Great (r. 522–486 B.C.E.)

CA. 300 B.C.E. Library founded at Alexandria, Egypt; grew into ancient world's foremost center of knowledge and learning

CA. C.E. 300–700 Library at Alexandria destroyed

C.E. 661–1258 Islamic Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties spread literacy throughout Southwest Asia, North Africa, and Iberia (modern-day Spain and Portugal)

wealthiest and most influential members of their societies. Early rulers soon came to realize that literacy conferred many advantages, and some took pains to compile and preserve written works as a way to strengthen their kingdoms. The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (r. ca. 669–627 B.C.E.), for example, was both literate and a collector of texts. He ordered a library to be built in the imperial city of Nineveh to house a collection of works from the various lands he conquered. Archeologists discovered the ruins of this library between C.E. 1849 and 1852. More than 26,000 pieces of tablets have been excavated from the site, representing approximately 10,000 documents.

The Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), had been instructed by his teacher, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), to respect all knowledge regardless of who produced it, to preserve it, and to use it for the improvement of humankind. As Alexander conquered Southwest Asia in the 330s and 320s B.C.E., he had libraries built throughout his new domains. These centers were meant not only to preserve knowledge, but also to be active centers of learning. The most famous library in the ancient world was founded in the Egyptian city of Alexandria (named after Alexander) in the third century B.C.E. Purported to hold virtually all of the knowledge compiled by the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean and Middle East, it was destroyed some time between the fourth and eighth centuries C.E.

Religions of Southwest Asia also played a key role in the spread of literacy. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are religions "of the book," that is, they are based on written sacred texts. In these faiths, it is essential that each of their followers be able to read the texts to fully understand the word of God. This aspect of these religions promoted the notion that literacy was not just a luxury for the wealthy and powerful, but an important path to a better understanding of the faith. Jews established educational centers in ancient Jerusalem

and elsewhere in their lands many years before Ashurbanipal built his library. Under the rule of the Islamic Umayyad (C.E. 661–750) and Abbasid (C.E. 750–1258) caliphs, literacy spread throughout North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the areas of modern-day Iran and Iraq. Universities offering instruction in science, history, mathematics, medicine, and religion were established in the Islamic Empire long before they appeared in Western Europe.

The development of writing was one of the most important events in history. It not only allowed people to share ideas and information while separated by physical distance but also to pass the ideas and knowledge of one generation to another.

See also: Assyria; Babylonia; Darius I, the Great; Jews and Judaism; Mesopotamia; Persia; Phoenicians; Sumer.

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Lydians

A wealthy people whose empire extended from the Aegean coast of Asia Minor across the western half of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and who dominated the region from about 690 to 546 B.C.E. Lydia had been part of the Hittite Empire, but became an independent kingdom after the collapse of the latter in the twelfth century B.C.E.

ECONOMY AND TRADE

Lydia was abundant in natural resources, including precious metals and fertile soil that regularly yielded surplus harvests. The Pactolus River was a particularly rich source of gold and electrum, an **alloy** of gold and silver. The gold from the Pactolus formed the basis of the legend of King Midas, who was said to turn everything he touched to gold. The Lydians used gold to mint the world's first known coins around 660 B.C.E. Lydia's agricultural surplus and high quality metalwork made the capital city of Sardis an important commercial center. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Lydians were the first people to build permanent shops for the sale of goods.

HISTORY

Lydia became a powerful empire under the Mermnad dynasty, whose founder was King Gyges (r. ca. 680–ca. 652 B.C.E.). Under his leadership, the kingdom expanded aggressively, seeking to annex Greek colonies on the western shores of Asia Minor. Although Gyges engaged in aggressive tactics close to home, he was diplomatic with more distant foreign powers, sending impressive gifts to several Greek **city-states**. These generous gifts kept the mainland city-states from interfering with his attacks against Ionian Greek cities in Asia Minor. Gyges was killed in a battle against the Cimmerians, a people living east of Lydia, in 652 B.C.E.

Gyges' son, Ardys II (r. ca. 652–ca. 625 B.C.E.), assumed the throne and set about retaking the Lydian cities that the Cimmerians had captured. With the help of the powerful Assyrian Empire to the south, Ardys was able to defeat the Cimmerians in 640 B.C.E. During the remaining years of his reign, he continued to conquer Greek towns and ports along the Ionian and Aegean coasts. His grandson,

This gold coin minted in about 550 B.C.E. in Lydia (in what is now Turkey) depicts a lion and bull facing one another. Scholars believe the Lydians were the first civilization to mint and use coins. The country was famously rich with gold, and the name of the Lydian king Croesus became synonymous with great wealth. (HIP/Art Resource, NY)

Alyattes (r. ca. 610–ca. 560 B.C.E.), continued Ardys' tactics and his pattern of offering diplomatic bribes to the mainland Greeks, with much success. In 585 B.C.E., Alyattes signed a peace treaty with the Medes, which established the Halys River as the eastern border of the Lydian Empire.

Allyates' son, Croesus (r. ca. 560–ca. 546 B.C.E.), was the last king of Lydia. Lydia prospered under his rule to such an extent that the phrase "rich as Croesus" came to denote anyone of extraordinary wealth. Thereafter, however, the Persian Empire under Cyrus II, the Great (r. ca. 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.), presented an increasing threat to Lydia from the south. In 547 B.C.E., the Persians conquered Lydia, but Cyrus respected Croesus enough to made him a royal councilor until his death around 546 B.C.E.

The Lydians and the Ionian Greek city-states they had conquered were made a province, or *satrapy*, of the Persian Empire. Lydia was still under Persian rule when Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), conquered the Persians in 330 B.C.E. Alexander absorbed the Lydians into the **Hellenistic** empire he created, and the Lydians subsequently adopted the Greek language and customs.

TURNING POINT

The First Coins

The world's first known coins were minted in Lydia during the reign of Gyges (r. ca. 680–ca. 652 B.C.E.). These early coins were oval-shaped ingots or bars made from electrum, an **alloy** of silver and gold. The gold was from the Pactolus River, and the silver may have been carried downstream from the Timolus and Sipylus mountains.

The Lydians collected the fine particles of gold by laying sheepskins on the riverbed and allowing the water to flow over them. The lanolin in the fleece held the gold but not the sand. The gold-covered sheepskins may be the origin of the myth of Jason's golden fleece.

In the sixth century B.C.E., King Croesus (r. ca. 560–ca. 546 B.C.E.) began to mint gold and silver coins. Small lumps of the metal were flattened out and each side was stamped with a tool or die that left an impression. One side typically showed a lion, which was the symbol of Lydia. The other side bore the king's symbol.

The government that issued the coin determined its value, which was indicated by the marks on the coin showing its weight. The invention of coinage made it possible to standardize prices for goods and attracted new buyers and sellers to the Lydian marketplace. It also facilitated trade by replacing the system of **barter**, in which goods of one type were traded for other goods that were considered of equal value. The small size of later coins made wealth portable, thus facilitating long-distance trade and commerce.

Lydia came under Roman rule in 133 B.C.E. and was incorporated into the Roman province of Asia Minor. In C.E. 296, it became a separate province as a result of the reorganization of the Roman Empire into eastern and western halves. By this time, however, the days of Lydian independence and power were long past.

See also: Anatolia; Persia.

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M

Mesopotamia

Region in southwest Asia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, known as the "cradle of civilization." "Mesopotamia" in Greek means "the land between the rivers."

Mesopotamia was at the heart of the Fertile Crescent, a swath of arable land surrounded by rugged and barren terrain that extended from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. The climate and topography of Mesopotamia varies greatly from north to south. Northern Mesopotamia is dry, with thin soil and irregular rainfall, but the presence of the two rivers provides sufficient water for agriculture. Southern Mesopotamia consists of low-lying agricultural plains that have richer soil but receive much less rain.

Its location between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers made Mesopotamia an ideal setting for early efforts at agriculture and animal domestication. By creating sophisticated irrigation systems to divert water from the rivers, farmers in the region raised a variety of crops including emmer wheat and barley, from which they made gruel (a kind of thick porridge), bread, and beer. They also raised grapes, apples, onions, and root vegetables such as turnips.

The rivers, fed by spring snow melt from the mountains of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), are an inconsistent source of abundance. Floods are irregular, both in timing and severity. In years of sparse snowfall, the flood is small and little water overflows the riverbanks. Heavier winter snowfall produces much more powerful floods that often cause tremendous damage.

Ancient farmers accommodated the patterns of flooding and, beginning around 5400 B.C.E., learned to harness the available water by creating irrigation systems. This allowed the development of large-scale agriculture that led to increased population. As the population grew, the inhabitants of the region developed increasingly sophisticated cultures and more **hierarchical** social structures. These developments, in turn, led to the rise of the world's first urban centers in Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C.E.

Five major civilizations thrived in ancient Mesopotamia: the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians. By the late fourth millennium B.C.E., the Sumerian civilization, which arose in the mid-sixth millennium B.C.E., had grown from small agriculture communities into a dozen **city-states** in southern Mesopotamia. The most important of these were Sumer, Ur, Uruk, Kish, Nippur, Umma, Eridu, and Lagash. The Sumerians are best known for their creation of the **cuneiform** writing system that consisted of **pictographs**, symbols that stood for specific objects. Cuneiform was used to record everything from religious rituals

LINK IN TIME

Medicine in Ancient Mesopotamia

Medicine in ancient Mesopotamia combined elements of science, folk wisdom, and belief in magic. Ancient physicians diagnosed and treated diseases in a way similar to their modern counterparts, but understanding of the causes and cures of afflictions often was grounded in religious belief and superstition. Archeologists have unearthed cuneiform tablets dating as early as 2500 B.C.E. which describe ancient Mesopotamian medical practices. The best known collection of these tablets is the "Treatise of Medical Diagnosis and Prognoses." The oldest surviving copy dates to around 1600 B.C.E., but its contents reflect centuries of previously acquired medical knowledge. The tablets accurately describe the symptoms of almost all diseases known to modern science. They also provide valuable insights into how ancient Mesopotamians thought about and treated disease.

Mesopotamians frequently attributed illnesses to the work of divinities or evil spirits; different spirits were responsible for diseases in specific parts of the body. However, physicians also understood that some illnesses resulted from improperly functioning organs or unbalanced bodily processes. Although a clear distinction existed between medical treatment of disease and prayers or offerings to gods and spirits, the line between the two often was blurred.

Medical practitioners called *ashipu* were responsible for diagnosing the patient's disease. If *ashipus* were unable to establish a physical cause for a disease, they would attempt to uncover a supernatural origin. This involved determining which god or demon was responsible as well as whether the disease was a punishment for some transgression by the patient. The *ashipu* might then try to exorcise the offending spirit using charms or incantations.

The *ashipu* might also refer the patient to an herbal specialist, or *asu*. The *asu* today would be considered a doctor, and ancient medical texts refer to the *asu* by the term "physician." The asu prepared herbal and natural remedies and supplied "first aid"——making and applying bandages and treatments for wounds. Many of the plant substances the *asu* used had antiseptic and antibiotic properties. The *asu* also seems to have understood the importance of the placebo effect, in which many people benefit psychologically from the simple act of receiving treatment, even if the treatment is medically ineffective.

to tax collections, laws, business contracts, and personal correspondence. It was also used to compose the world's earliest works of literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Enuma Elish*, creation stories that explain the Sumerian understanding of the origins of humankind.

The Sumerians were also the first to erect monumental buildings, in the form of temple complexes called *ziggurats*. These structures consisted of several platforms set atop one another, each smaller than the one beneath it. At the top of the ziggurat was an altar used for religious ceremonies and sacrifices. Ziggurats dominated the skyline of Sumerian cities, with some attaining a height of 150 feet (46 m).

The Akkadians, who conquered Sumer around 2330 B.C.E., adopted these Sumerian innovations. Under the leadership of their king Sargon the Great (r. ca. 2334–ca. 2279 B.C.E.), the Akkadians unified Mesopotamia under their authority, thanks in large part to a series of roads that connected the region's subject populations and trading centers. The Akkadians also introduced a postal system that allowed royal, governmental, commercial, and personal correspondence to move swiftly through the empire. The Akkadian Empire was short-lived, however, and collapsed around 2150 B.C.E.

After the fall of Akkad, the Babylonian Empire (ca. 2000–539 B.C.E.) emerged as the most powerful political force in Mesopotamia. While the Babylonians adopted Sumerian writing, architecture, and religion, they also made their own significant contributions to Mesopotamian culture. They developed a

highly advanced mathematical system based on the number 60, which formed the foundation of modern systems of time measurement and geometry. The division of hours into 60 minutes and minutes into 60 seconds is derived from the Babylonian system, as is the division of the circle into 360 degrees.

By the eighth century B.C.E., the northern Mesopotamian empire of Assyria had become the region's dominant power. While the Assyrians made no significant contributions to science, math, or architecture, they pioneered key advances in government administration. King Tiglath-Pileser III (r. ca. 745–727 B.C.E.) formed an effective centralized government over a diverse and far-flung empire. His model of administration set the example followed by the Persian Empire under Cyrus II, the Great (r. ca. 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.). Both of these leaders incorporated newly conquered territories as locally governed provinces. Defeated former rulers or their subordinates typically were allowed to remain in power as imperial governors, subject to the authority of the emperor.

The last great power to arise in ancient Mesopotamia was the Persian Empire (648–330 B.C.E.). Perhaps the most lasting contribution of the Persian civilization was the founding of the world's first **monotheistic** religion, Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism spread rapidly throughout the empire during the reign of emperor Darius I, the Great (r. 522–486 B.C.E.), who was an ardent follower. The Persian Empire eventually fell to the Macedonian conqueror Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E), in the late fourth century B.C.E. This ushered in a long period of foreign domination, during which Mesopotamia was ruled in turn by the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, and Ottomans.

See also: Assyria; Babylonia; Fertile Crescent; Persia; Sumer.

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Mohenjo-Daro

See Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

Monsoons

Seasonal winds that bring heavy rains from the Indian Ocean to the Indian subcontinent. The term is derived from the Arabic word *mawsim*, meaning "season." The monsoons dramatically shaped the patterns of settlement, agriculture, and trade that developed in ancient India and had a great impact on life in ancient Southwest Asia.

The climate of the Indian subcontinent is a product of its geography, surrounded by large bodies of water to the east, south, and west, and by the Himalayan mountains to the north. Monsoons are caused by the fact that land heats up and cools down more quickly than water. This creates a drastic difference

between the temperature of the air over the land and that over the surrounding seas. The hot air rises, creating an area of low pressure that draws in cooler air from adjacent areas of higher pressure. During the summer, this causes cool air from the sea to blow inland. During winter the pattern reverses, and cooler air from the land blows out to sea.

The region has two monsoonal seasons. The summer, or southwestern, monsoon season lasts from June to September. During this time, the wind blows inland from the Indian Ocean to the southwest and moves northeast over the subcontinent. The air is heavy with water, which is released as it moves over the warmer landmass. This causes rapid and heavy rainfall in the region of modern-day Pakistan and central India. The southwestern monsoon often drops as much as 400 inches (1,000 cm) of rain in these four months. This rain allows the farmers to grow crops and to store water for irrigation during the dry months of the year.

The winter, or northeast, monsoon follows between October and December, with winds moving from the northeast to the southwest. In winter, the land cools off quickly, but the ocean retains heat longer. The resulting high pressure over the land and lower pressure over the water forces cool air from the Himalayas and central India to move towards the Indian Ocean. The monsoon winds pull much of the moisture out of the air and soil, creating a drier climate in central India. The moisture picked up by these winds falls as rain in western India.

The monsoons had a tremendous impact on agriculture in ancient Southwest Asia. Monsoonal rainfall and annual flooding made farming possible in areas of modern-day India and Pakistan. People of the Indus River valley civilization, for example, including those in the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, used storage tanks to hold the monsoonal rainwater until it was needed in the fields.

The monsoons also facilitated trade between India and the outside world and allowed Indian merchants to become middlemen in the trade between the Roman world and Asia. Using the southwestern monsoon winds, Indian merchants sailed to Java, in modern-day Indonesia, where they sold Indian muslin and cotton **textiles** and purchased luxury goods on behalf of Roman clients. The Roman writer Pliny the Elder (23–79 C.E.) in his *Natural History* complained, "Not a year passed in which India did not take 50 million sesterces away from Rome," spent on pepper and luxury goods from Asia. The wealth that flowed into India led to the development of urban centers such as Kaveripattinam, whose existence was based on international trade.

See also: Agriculture; Technology and Inventions.

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Muhammad

See Islam; Religion.

Myths and Epics

The forces of nature that shaped the everyday world of the peoples of the Near East and ancient Southwest Asia also played a central role in the tales told by the region's earliest inhabitants. The stories sought to explain the universe and the place of human beings in it.

The region's oldest surviving myths—traditional stories that help explain the mysteries of life—came from the Sumerians, who developed the world's first civilization in southern Mesopotamia in the late

fourth millennium B.C.E. Some of these early myths and epics also formed the basis of tales that were central to later Middle Eastern beliefs. These ancient tales help preserve the culture and traditions of a society.

The Mesopotamian civilizations that succeeded the Sumerians—such as the Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians—worshiped many of the Sumerian deities and adopted and elaborated on Sumerian myths. By contrast, the Persians, who became the region's dominant civilization in the sixth century B.C.E., had a significantly different set of religious beliefs that produced a mythology unique from that of the earlier Mesopotamian cultures.

MESOPOTAMIAN COSMOLOGY

Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian mythology derived from a common origin and show clear parallels with one another. The major Sumerian deities included An, the god of heaven; Ninlil, the goddess of creation; Inanna, the goddess of love and war; and Nanna, god of the moon. The Babylonians and Assyrians worshipped most of these same deities, although often under local names. In Babylonian mythology, for example, Inanna became Ishtar, but remained associated with love and war. These later cultures also modified the **pantheon** to include their own principal deities, such as the Babylonian god Marduk and the Assyrian sky god, Ashur.

Ancient Mesopotamian cosmology, or beliefs about the nature of the universe, focused on the association between divine beings and powerful earthly forces such as natural phenomena, human love, or warfare. Events on earth were believed to mirror events in the divine world. Natural disasters, such as floods or droughts, were understood as expressions of a deity's anger; earthly wars were said to reflect heavenly struggles between gods and goddesses.

Inanna and Dumuzi: A Sumerian Myth

The Sumerian's intimate connection to the natural world is exemplified by one of the oldest Sumerian myths, that of Inanna and Dumuzi, which explores the origins of the seasons. The story became widely popular and finds parallels in Greek mythology some two millennia later.

Inanna was the Sumerian goddess of love and war, known to the later Babylonians as Ishtar. According to the story, Inanna decides to travel to the underworld, which is ruled by her jealous sister, Ereshkigal. When Inanna arrives in the underworld, Ereshkigal orders her to be killed. Inanna's servant, however, escapes and appeals for help to the other gods, who eventually are able to restore Inanna to life. Nevertheless, Ereshkigal will not allow Inanna to return to the earth unless another body takes her place in the underworld. After refusing to let her servant or beautician take her place, Inanna sees her lover Dumuzi, who is drinking, laughing, and acting as if he is unaware that Inanna is even missing. The displeased Inanna selects Dumuzi to take her place in the underworld for six months of each year, with Dumuzi's sister spending the other half of the year below.

Inanna comes to regret her choice, however. During the six months when Dumuzi is in the underworld, Inanna is unhappy and allows nothing on earth to grow. When she is reunited with her lover, the crops and animals reproduce. The Greek myth of Persephone and Hades closely parallels this Sumerian tale. In the Greek story, Hades, god of the underworld, kidnaps Persephone and takes her to his realm, where she must remain for six months of each year. Persephone's mother, Demeter, the goddess of grain, mourns during these months and will allow nothing to grow until her daughter returns each spring.

Enuma Elish

Enuma Elish is the name of the ancient Babylonian creation myth. However, this work does not simply tell the story of the origin of the universe, it offers a justification for the supremacy of the Babylonian's chief deity, Marduk, over all other gods. The title, which means "When on high," comes from the opening words of the tale. The oldest version of the story dates to about 1700 B.C.E., during the height of the Old Babylonian Empire.

In the story, Apsu, god of fresh waters, and his son, Mummu, conspire to kill several other gods. However, Ea, the god of waters under the earth, thwarts the plan by killing Apsu. Afterward, Apsu's wife, Tiamat, goddess of salt water, plans revenge

This carving of the Amorite demon Humbaba, genie and legendary guardian of the famed cedar forests of ancient Lebanon, is about 20,000 years old. In the ancient Sumerian poem the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the title hero and his companion Enkidu cut off the demon's head in their pursuit of the tree of immortality. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

against these rival gods for causing her husband's death. Some deities support Tiamat in her plan, while others oppose her. Those opposed to Tiamat select Ea's son, Marduk, to do battle with her. In the ensuing combat, Marduk kills Tiamat and creates the world from her corpse.

Tiamat's supporters are at first forced to serve the other gods. However, Marduk frees them by slaying Tiamat's second husband, Kingu, and creating humankind from Kingu's blood. In return, the gods make Marduk their king, elevating him over Enlil, who was chief deity of the Sumerians. This symbolizes the ascent of Babylonia over Sumer as the dominant power in Mesopotamia.

Epic of Gilgamesh

Whereas myths are tales of the gods, epics typically are tales of the exploits of humans. They often take the form of a continuous narrative of an individual's life, focusing on significant or heroic deeds that express the values considered to be important by members of the culture that created the epic. Epics can serve as valuable resources for historians. Read with judgment and care, epics can reveal a great deal about the daily life, values, fears, and accomplishments of the people they depict.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the oldest known work of literature, with the earliest Sumerian versions dating to 1800 B.C.E. It tells of the relationship between the

LINK TO PLACE

The Watery Void

The Mesopotamian creation myths, like those of many other cultures, associate the origins of the universe and the creation of the earth with a primeval watery void. In many cases, these original waters symbolize chaos, disorganization, and death, and creation begins when the waters are no longer dominant. For example, the Babylonian creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*, relates that Apsu, the god of fresh waters, and his wife, Tiamat, goddess of salt waters, foment chaos by attacking the other gods. When the god Marduk finally kills Tiamat, he fashions the heavens and earth from her body.

Similarly, according to the traditional creation myth of the Cherokee people in the eastern United States, all creation was originally covered with water. Because none of the animals could live in the water, the sky above was overcrowded. One day the water beetle volunteered to dive beneath the water to see what was there. He found mud, which he brought up to the surface to create the land. When the mud dried, the animals moved to the land and populated the earth.

The Iroquois of the northeastern United State also tell of a watery abyss at the start of creation. A community of people, however, dwelt in the Sky World above. One day, a woman in the Sky World dreamed that a certain tree was the source of light. She asked the men to dig up the tree to make room for more light. When they did so, the tree fell into the hole they dug, and the Sky World was plunged into darkness. The men then threw the woman into the hole. As she fell toward the abyss, a hawk tried to slow her fall, but he could not support her and he asked the other animals to create solid ground to hold her. Ducks brought mud from the ocean floor and smeared it onto the backs of turtles to form the land. In this manner, the earth was formed, and the people on it descended from the woman from the Sky World.

In each of these ancient stories, despite their existence over great distances, primal water is a recurring symbol from which the world comes into being.

mythical hero-king Gilgamesh, who is believed to have ruled around 2700 B.C.E., and his adventures with a friend named Enkidu. Because **archeologists** have identified two individuals named in the story as historical kings of Sumer, scholars suspect that Gilgamesh is based on an historical figure.

In the epic, Gilgamesh is portrayed as mostly divine, but also part human, and a harsh ruler. In response to his subjects' complaints about Gilgamesh, Aruru, the goddess of creation, fashions the wild man Enkidu as a rival and distraction for the king. After an inconclusive fight with Enkidu, Gilgamesh proposes that the two go on a journey to the Cedar Forest to kill a demon. This begins a series of adventures that cause Gilgamesh and Enkidu to run afoul of the gods. After the gods kill Enkidu, Gilgamesh sets out on another journey to avoid Enkidu's fate by achieving immortality. In the end, Gilgamesh loses his chance at immortality but realizes that humans can live on through the works of culture and civilization they leave for future generations.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* combines elements of both myth and epic. Like a myth, it deals with larger philosophical questions of the meaning of existence, humankind's purpose in the world, and the mystery of death. It also describes the world of gods and goddesses and reflects the uncertain relationship between the gods and humankind in Sumerian culture. However, in its focus on the adventures of an heroic individual and his struggles, it embodies the essence of an epic. The hardships that Gilgamesh and Enkidu encounter—hunger, illness, flooding, and death—represented real challenges in the lives of all Sumerians, and the actions of the characters served as examples of how humans can find meaning in life, even if they cannot control their fate.

PERSIAN COSMOLOGY

Persian mythology has its roots in the tribal cultures of Central Asia and what is now Iran. Unlike the Mesopotamians, the Persians did not have an extensive pantheon populated with gods representing various natural forces. Instead, the Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, saw existence as a struggle between the forces of good and evil, represented by the divine figures Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman.

Many characters in the Persian myths are not gods but powerful heroes and their terrifying demonic opponents—figures with often superhuman abilities who are, nevertheless, not divine. Among the most important of the heroes is Rostam, the greatest of Persian champions who, like the later Greek hero Hercules, must perform seven daunting tasks while attempting to save the life of his king. Several Persian tales involve battles between Rostam and fierce beasts that represent chaos and evil. A principal evil figure is Zahhak, a demon with three mouths, six eyes, three heads, and with serpents growing from his shoulders. According to Persian myth, the hero Oraetaona defeated Zahhak and chained him to a mountain. However, the myth goes on to say that, at the end of the world, Zahhak will break his bonds and ravage the world until he is defeated by another hero.

THE SHAHNAMA

The central collection of Persian myths is called the *Shahnama*, which provides a mythical history of Persia since the creation of the universe. The *Shahnama* combines elements of myth and epic, focusing as it does on both the actions of divine characters who shape earthly events, and on the heroic exploits of humans. As an extended poem of some 60,000 couplets (pairs of rhyming line), the *Shahnama*'s structure is typical of epics. Like myths, however, the story attempts to explain the origins of the Persian people and major events that shaped Persian civilization.

The *Shahnama* begins with a creation story that includes an account of the first human, Keyumars, who also became the world's first king. One of the great early heroes in the tale is Keyumars' grandson, Hushang, who defeats an army assembled by the son of the evil spirit Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman. The poem credits Hushang with inventing agriculture, irrigation, and ironworking; domesticating livestock; and discovering how to make fire. According to the *Shahnama*, the latter feat occurred when Hushang hurled a piece of flint at a serpent and missed. When the flint struck another rock, it produced sparks, which Hushang realized could be used to start a fire.

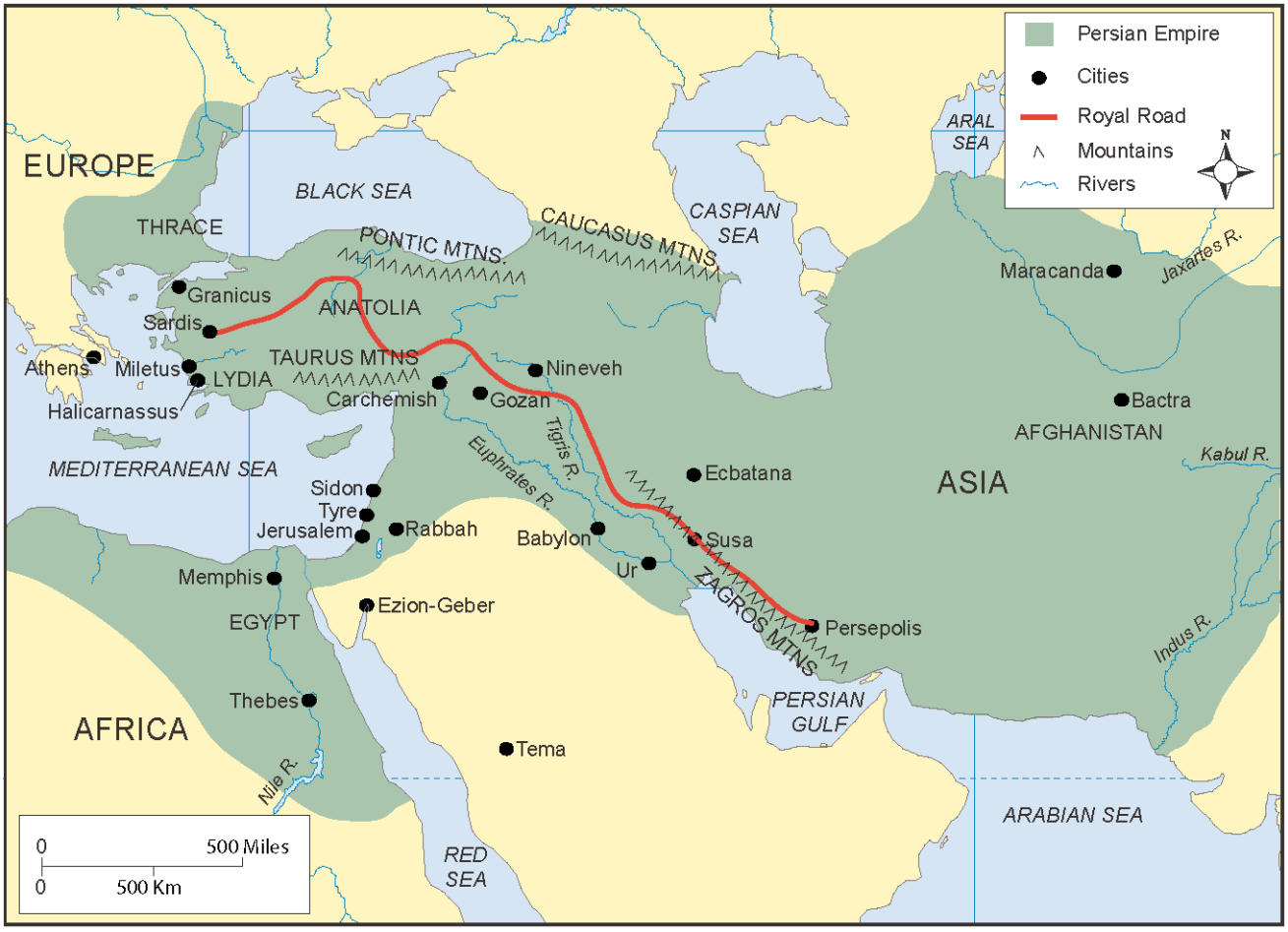
This introductory portion of the *Shahnama* is relatively brief, less than 5 percent of the entire work. Most of the story is devoted to the so-called "Age of Heroes," a semi-legendary history of the Achaemenid Persian Empire from its prehistoric roots until its defeat at the hands of the Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), in the fourth century B.C.E. This portion of the work contains the story of the seven labors of Rostam. The poem concludes with a history of post-Alexandrian Persia through the conquest of the Sassanid Persian Empire (C.E. 226–651) by Arab Muslims. Historians consider this portion of the text to be quite accurate, despite its romantic language and clear antipathy toward the Arabs, whom it calls "the army of darkness."

The *Shahnama* serves both to inspire its readers with the glories of Persia's past and to caution them about the transient nature of the world. While it praises and immortalizes the achievements of both mythical and historical Persians, it also shows that even great empires and heroes can come and go in the blink of an eye. It asks its readers to contemplate the impermanence of life and the small scope of their own hopes and desires. Because one's time on earth is short, it argues, one should avoid evil and strive for justice and truth. Although the *Shahnama* shares little with most Mesopotamian myths, it does serve the same basic purpose—to convey the central ideas of its culture in a form that is both approachable and memorable.

See also: Babylonia; Culture and Tradition; Language and Writing; Persia; Religion; Society; Sumer; Zoroastrianism.

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE, CA. 550-330 B.C.E.

In 525 B.C.E., when the Persian king Cambyses II conquered Egypt, the Persian Empire became the largest in history. It stretched from the Mediterranean coast in the west to India in the east.



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P

Parthian Empire

Empire centered in ancient Persia (present-day Iran) between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, a kingdom that controlled the eastern Arabian Peninsula and much of Central Asia from about 250 B.C.E. to about C.E. 226. Its location brought it into contact with three of the leading civilizations of the **era**: that of Rome, of India, and of China.

The Parthians, originally called the Arsacids, were a branch of the nomadic Scythian peoples who lived east of the Caspian Sea. At the time of the rise of the Parthians, the Seleucid dynasty was the major power in the area, having taken over Persia following the death of Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.). Arsaces (247–211 B.C.E.), chieftain of the Arsacids, led a rebellion against the Seleucids and won control over the region of Parthia, in what is now northern Iran. The Parthians closed off trade routes between the Seleucid lands and China, which led to the eventual fall of the Seleucids in 60 B.C.E. As the Seleucids declined in power, the Parthians conquered new lands including Bactria, in northern India. By the late first century C.E., the Parthian kingdom emerged as an empire that reached from Armenia to India.

Ruling over an expanding empire populated by peoples that spoke different languages, practiced different faiths, and retained their own cultures required new approaches to governance. The Parthians allowed subject peoples to retain their own leadership and customs as long as they paid **tribute** to the Parthian king. Parthia reopened the trade routes with Han China (206 B.C.E.–C.E. 220), including the famed Silk Road, which stretched eastward from the Mediterranean Sea to China and supplied Asian luxury goods to the West.

The Parthian Empire rose to dominance in the Middle East and Central Asia at roughly the same time as the Roman Empire was expanding its power and influence over Europe and North Africa. As the Roman Empire expanded eastward, its subjects encountered and clashed with Parthians and invaded Parthian lands in 53 B.C.E. However, the Parthians, known as skilled archers and horsemen, defeated the Romans at the Battle of Carrhae, in modern-day Turkey, and conquered Roman-held territory in Syria. Fighting between the two empires continued on and off for three centuries.

Internal struggles weakened the Parthian Empire and contributed significantly to its collapse. The power of the Parthian nobility was based on its military leadership, the nobles' ability to gain more direct control over their land, and the peasants being free of royal interference. Over time,

however, the nobles began to refuse to pay their taxes or answer the king's call to serve in the army. With less money coming into the government, and an unreliable military force to command, royal authority decreased.

In C.E. 110, the Parthians conquered Armenia and deposed the king, who was a **vassal** of Rome. This led once again to war with Rome, and over the next 90 years, the empires fought a series of wars that weakened both kingdoms considerably. Invasions from the Sassanid rulers of Persia led to further loss of Parthian territory. By C.E. 224, the Sassanids had completed the conquest of Parthia to become the dominant force in the region; the Parthian Empire fell soon after.

See also: Persia; Scythians.

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Persia

One of the largest empires of the ancient world, based in what is now Iran and extending from Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to the Persian Gulf and the Indus River. The Achaemenid Dynasty, which ruled over this empire, established a culture that differed significantly from the Mesopotamian empires that previously had dominated Southwest Asia and the Near East.

GROWTH OF THE EMPIRE

King Achaemenes founded the first Persian state in central Iran around 700 B.C.E. At this time, the Persians were subjects of the kingdom of Media, to whom they paid **tribute**. Within 50 years, the Persians had moved to southern Iran, where they split into two separate kingdoms. In 550 B.C.E., Cyrus II, the Great (r. ca. 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.), united these two Persian states and defeated the Medes to establish an independent Persian kingdom. He subsequently conquered the kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and expanded his empire into southern Mesopotamia.

In 539 B.C.E., Cyrus captured the city of Babylon, toppling the Neo-Babylonian Empire and setting the tone for Achaemenid political administration over the next 200 years. He issued a proclamation promising not to destroy the local culture or institutions, nor to terrorize the citizens. This policy stood in stark contrast to those of the Assyrians and Babylonians, who forcefully subjugated conquered peoples and repressed local cultures. The following year, Cyrus reinforced his reputation for religious tolerance by ending the so-called Babylonian Exile. In ca. 586 B.C.E., the Babylonians expelled the Jews from Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish temple because the Jews refused to worship Babylonian gods. Almost 50 years later, Cyrus allowed the Jews to return home and rebuild the temple. Cyrus's expansive treatment of the Jews, then a relatively insignificant tribal people unrelated to the Persians, was extraordinary for its day.

Cyrus's son, Cambyses III (r. ca. 530–522 B.C.E.), succeeded his father as king. Cambyses' major contribution to the Empire was the conquest of Egypt in 525 B.C.E.

Darius I, the Great (r. 522–486 B.C.E.), followed Cambyses on the throne and conquered lands all the way to the Caucasus and northward into modern-day Armenia. Under Darius, the Persian Empire grew to include the Sudan, Egypt's Nile Valley, Lydia, Babylon, all of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), Thrace (in what is now Bulgaria), the Caucasus, Afghanistan, parts of Central Asia, and northern India. This far-flung empire, comprising a wide diversity of cultures, dominated the ancient world but proved a challenge to rule.

RULING AN EMPIRE

To maintain effective control over their empire, the Persians divided it into administrative *satrapies*, or provinces, each of which was organized by ethnic identity and often had a small Persian population present. A governor called a *satrap* ruled each province as a virtual client king, exercising almost unlimited authority to collect taxes, enforce laws, act as the supreme judge, and control all political appointments. In times of unrest, the satrap also served as commander in chief of the local army district. Despite their broad powers, satraps ruled in the name of the Persian emperor and were subject to close oversight by a royal secretary, a council of Persian advisors, and an official known as "the eye of the king," who made an annual inspection of each province.

The system of satrapies traced its roots to the Persians' former overlords, the Medes. Although Cyrus overthrew Median domination, he retained their basic administrative organization, applying it to his earliest conquests. Darius expanded and refined the system, creating 23 satrapies throughout the empire (some divided into sub-units for easier administration) and standardizing the amount of tribute collected by each satrap. The system allowed for local rule of subject peoples while allowing the emperor to retain close central control of affairs in distant corners of the empire.

Another significant challenge facing the Persians was facilitating travel and communication across a vast land empire. Darius responded by building the Royal Road, a major thoroughfare that allowed the Persians to deliver messages quickly and to move troops where and when they were needed. The road ran 1,677 miles (2,700 km) from the eastern capital of Susa (in modern-day Iran), to the primary capital of Persepolis, to the city of Sardis in modern-day Turkey. It was dotted with 111 transfer stations where riders could change horses, rest, and eat. A royal courier could travel the entire road in seven days. Many historians consider the Persian couriers to be the world's first postal system.

The Royal Road was just one of the steps Darius took to promote trade and commerce. He standardized weights and measures throughout the empire and introduced a gold coin of standard weight, the Daric. He also sent exploratory expeditions up the Kabul and Indus rivers and into the

ANCIENT WEAPONS

Persian Swords and Daggers

The ancient Persians used two types of bladed weapons in combat. The longer of the two was the *kopis*, a single-edged sword with a heavy curved blade. It may have evolved from the similarly shaped *khopesh*, used by the Egyptians and Canaanites. The term *kopis* is a Greek word meaning "to cut," but the ancient Greeks typically preferred straight-bladed sword called the *xipos*. In Greek art, Persian soldiers often are shown wielding the kopis or an axe.

Persian soldiers also carried a short dagger called an *acinaces*. The Scythians first used this type of weapon, but the Persians adopted it and made it famous. The popularity of the acinaces was so widespread that it even influenced the design of Chinese weapons. The acinaces featured a double-edged blade and was worn hanging from the right hip. It was intended to be used for quick, surprise thrusts.

Later medieval writers tended to confuse the acinaces with the *shamshir*, a curved sword used much later by Persian soldiers. The shamshir, however, was much closer in design to the kopis than it was to the acinaces. Ancient Greek and Roman authors state that the Persian king gave acinaces to warriors as a sign of favor, which suggests that the weapon was a dagger and not a sword. The first-century C.E. Roman Jewish historian Josephus also writes of "small swords, which were like the Persian acinaces in respect to their size. . . ." This, too, argues that the acinaces was a dagger.

Shown here are the remains of the palace of Cyrus II, the Great, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia and emperor of Persia from 559 to 530 B.C.E. Under Cyrus, Persia overthrew the dominance of the Medes in 550 B.C.E. and eventually united the Medes and Persians into one of the great empires of the ancient world. (SEF/Art Resource, NY)

Indian Ocean in search of new trading markets. Darius even ordered construction of a 125-mile-long (200-km) canal to connect the Mediterranean and Red seas. This provided a continuous water connection between Persian territories in Egypt and the eastern lands of the empire, greatly facilitating trade.

From the beginning of the Persian empire, its policies regarding captured lands were tolerant and fair, and the government respected the diversity of the people living in the empire. These policies were heavily influenced by Zoroastrianism, a **monotheistic** religion whose basic tenets included fair and equitable treatment of all individuals and respect for all living creatures. Cyrus's proclamation of mercy on capturing Babylon is preserved in a **cuneiform inscription** on an **artifact** known as the Cyrus Cylinder, an ancient large clay cylinder covered with writing. It describes Cyrus' defeat of Babylon and states that he returned the images or statues of various Babylonian gods to their temples. Under Darius, the empire also adopted a no slavery policy; all of the workers who built government projects under Darius were paid for their labor.

DECLINE AND FALL

At its height under Darius, Persia was the unchallenged master of Southwest Asia and the Near East, the largest empire the ancient world had seen to that date. The massive Persian army, and the relative ease with which the Persians dispatched and then assimilated their enemies, earned them the fear and respect of neighboring cultures. However, even the Persians were forced to deal with local uprisings. In the late sixth century B.C.E., Ionian Greeks in western Asia Minor rebelled against the Persian presence in their homeland.

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

CA. 559–CA. 530 B.C.E. Reign of Cyrus II, the Great, who united the Persians and founded the first Persian Empire

CA. 530–522 B.C.E. Reign of Cambyses III, who added Egypt to the Persian Empire in 525 B.C.E.

522–486 B.C.E. Reign of Darius I, who expanded Persian lands to include Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), the Caucasus, the Sudan, parts of southeastern Europe, Central Asia, northern India, and the Sudan

CA. 499–479 B.C.E. Persian Wars, pitting Persia against Greek city-states led by Athens; end in Greek victory

334 B.C.E. Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), invades Persia

330 B.C.E. Alexander III, the Great, defeats Persian king Darius III at Issus and conquers Persian Empire, declaring himself new king of Persia

323 B.C.E. Seleucus I Nicator, a former commander under Alexander III, the Great, seizes power over Persia following Alexander's death

323 B.C.E–60 B.C.E. Seleucid dynasty rules over dwindling remains of ancient Persia

The Ionians appealed to other Greeks for assistance, and the Greek **city-state** of Athens came to their aid. This led to the Persian Wars (ca. 499–479 B.C.E.), fought between Persia and a coalition of Greek city-states. Both Darius and his successor, Xerxes I (r. 486–465 B.C.E.), underestimated the organization of the Greeks. Greek victories at the battles of Marathon (490 B.C.E.), Salamis (480 B.C.E), and Plataea (479 B.C.E.) ended the Persian invasion.

The Persians got their revenge against the Greeks during the Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 B.C.E.), which pitted the Athenian Empire against a coalition of city-states led by Sparta. The Persians supported the Spartans, whose defeat of Athens ended the Athenian Empire. This opened Greece up to invasion by the Macedonian king Philip II (r. 359–336 B.C.E.), who conquered most of the peninsula.

Following Philip's death, his son, Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), took the throne. Alexander, who aspired to be the master of the ancient world, decided to lead an expedition against Persia, the greatest power of the day. Alexander invaded Persia in 334 B.C.E., sweeping his opponents before him and conquering great swaths of Persian territory. In 330 B.C.E., he defeated the Persian army and killed King Darius III (r. 335–330 B.C.E), proclaiming himself the new king of Persia. Alexander died just seven years later, however, and the empire he had fashioned quickly broke apart. His trusted commander, Seleucus I Nicator (358–281 B.C.E.) subsequently seized power in the region and established the Seleucid dynasty (323–60 B.C.E.) as rulers over Persia. However, the Seleucid Empire was only a shadow of what Persia had been in terms of size, military might, economic resources, and power in the region.

See also: Darius I, the Great; Indus River; Lydians; Parthian Empire; Technology and Inventions.

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Phoenicians

Ancient seafaring people who lived along the east coast of the Mediterranean and who emerged as a dominant trading power in the region after 1200 B.C.E. The Phoenicians are best remembered for their major contribution to human culture—the invention of the world's first phonetic alphabet.

The origins of the Phoenicians are unclear, and most of what is known about them comes from external sources, particularly the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus (484–425 B.C.E.). The Phoenicians may have migrated from the Persian Gulf area around 3000 B.C.E. before settling along the coast of the eastern Mediterranean Sea in the region of Canaan, in modern-day Lebanon. During the second millennium B.C.E., this land was controlled by Egypt, Hittites from Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and Assyrians from eastern Mesopotamia. As the power of these groups in the region faded beginning the thirteenth century B.C.E., the Phoenicians rose in influence.

TRADE AND GOVERNMENT

Phoenician trade prospered for two reasons. First, the majority of the goods they traded were items that brought high profits. These included cedar and pine timber, fine linen, embroidered cloth, wine, gold and silver jewelry, carved ivory from Africa, and glassware. Their most famous product was cloth colored with a purple dye made from snails that lived only along the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. Second, the Phoenicians participated in transit trade, charging a fee to transport goods from other countries to overseas markets where they were in demand. By 1200 B.C.E., the Phoenicians had established a number of independent port cit-

TURNING POINT

The Phoenician Alphabet

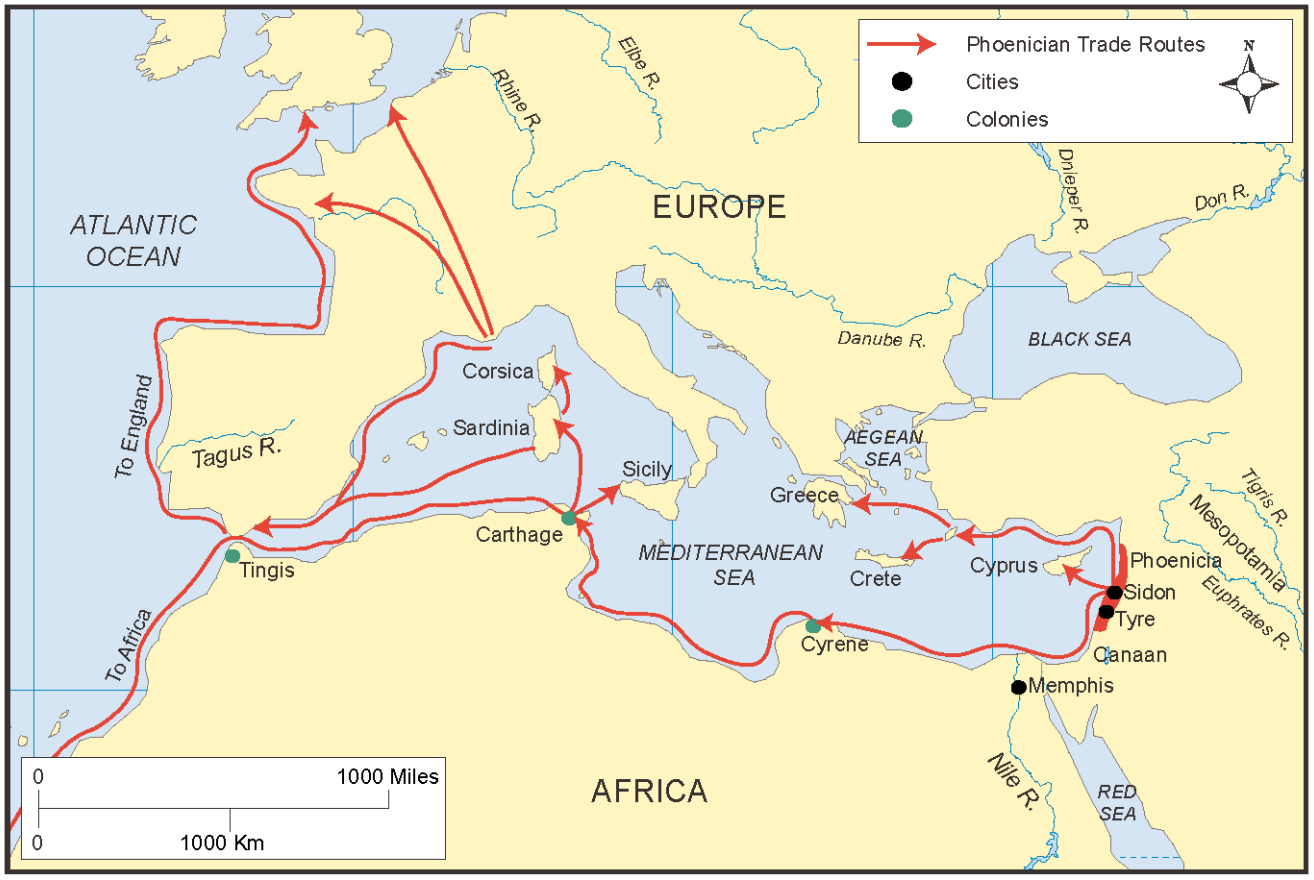
The Phoenician alphabet is derived from an earlier form of writing called Proto-Sinaitic script, which arose in the Sinai, a desert region in what is now southern Israel, around 1700 B.C.E. At that time, **Semitic**-speaking peoples under Egyptian rule inhabited this area. These people adapted existing Egyptian hieroglyphs to create their own written language. The pronunciation of each letter was based on the shape of the hieroglyph chosen. For example, the hieroglyphic symbol for a house represented the sound "b," because the word for house in their spoken language was *beth*.

The Phoenician alphabet, a more stylized and linear version of Proto-Sinaitic, was one of several scripts that sprung from Proto-Sinaitic. Around 1300 B.C.E., a separate branch of the script that began to evolve in the Arabian Peninsula became the South Arabian script. Merchants carried this system of writing across the Red Sea to East Africa, where it eventually became the Ethiopic script, which is still used today.

Proto-Sinaitic, and most of the scripts that developed directly from it, do not include symbols for vowel sounds. When the Greeks adopted the Phoenician script around 800 B.C.E., it included four symbols for sounds not found in spoken Greek. The Greeks used these symbols to represent vowel sounds, which the Romans subsequently adopted for use in the modern, or Latin, alphabet. Similarly, the principal change that occurred in the transition from South Arabic to Ethiopic was the addition of marks to certain consonant symbols to indicate vowel sounds.

PHOENICIAN TRADE ROUTES, CA. 1200 B.C.E.

The Phoenicians were a seafaring people who mastered the art of trade, controlling trade routes on both land and sea.



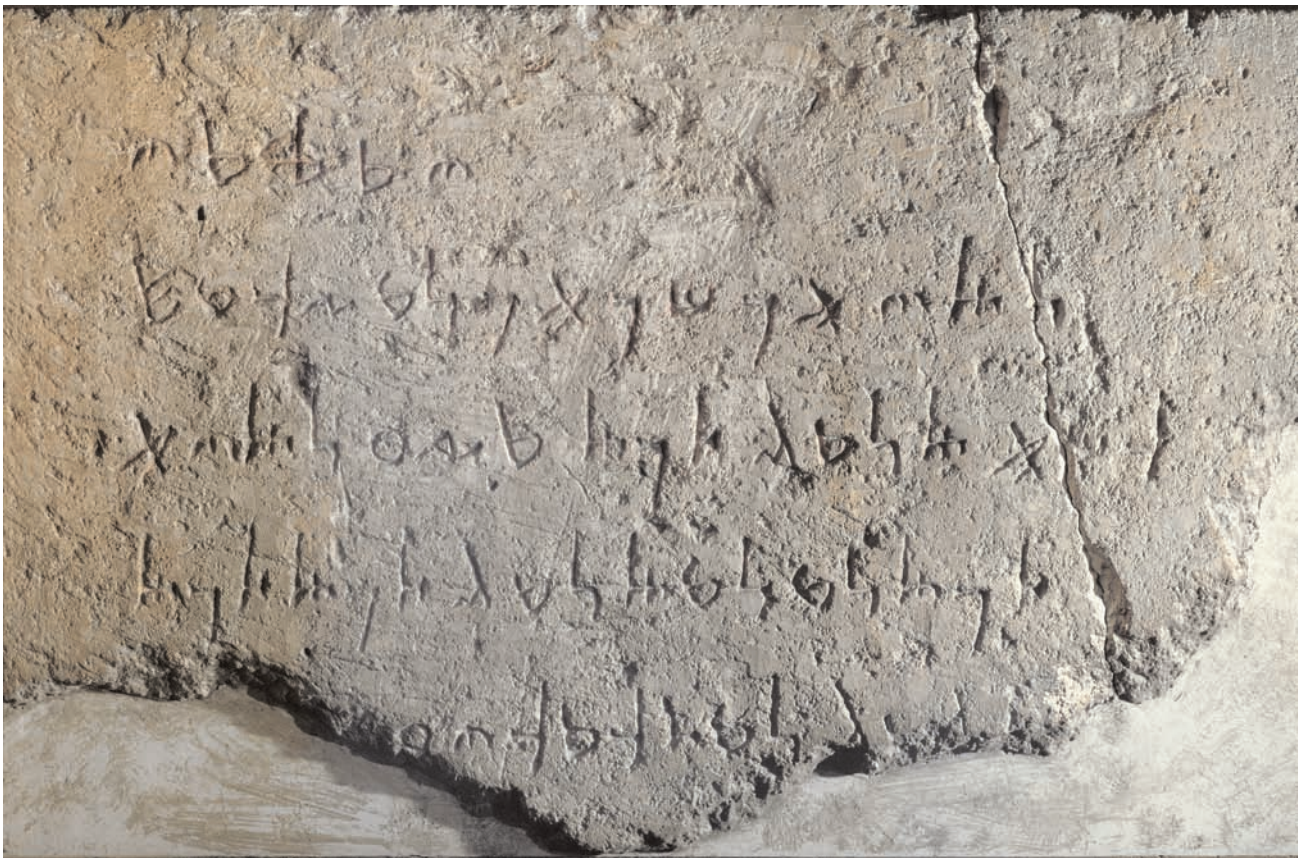
ies, the most important of which were Sidon and Tyre, located in what is now Lebanon.

To further their control over the Mediterranean Sea trade, and to keep their competitors from building up their own trading networks, the Phoenicians founded colonies along the coast of North Africa and on islands of the Mediterranean Sea including Cyprus, Corsica, and Sardinia. Chief among these was the colony of Carthage, founded in 814 B.C.E. in what is now Libya. Carthage eventually became a significant military power in its own right. The Phoenician trading network extended as far west as the Iberian Peninsula (modern-day Spain and Portugal). The Phoenicians controlled not only trade within the Mediterranean, but also the flow of goods such as silk and porcelain pottery from Asia, which entered the region exclusively through Phoenician ports.

Each Phoenician **city-state** was ruled by a king who governed the city and the countryside around it. He was advised by two groups: the priests and a council of elders, drawn from the upper classes. Since seaborne trade was critical to the economic success of each city, each new Phoenician settlement was built around a harbor and port. Near the harbor area was a market. These markets met the needs of the local population for food, clothing, and luxury goods imported from Asia and different places in the Mediterranean world. Each city was divided into sections in which different trades were located and was fortified by defensive walls.

ALPHABET

Early Phoenician traders used the ancient Mesopotamian writing system called **cuneiform**



This fragment of a Phoenician inscription from the Eshmun Temple in Sidon was found in modern Lebanon. Around 1200 B.C.E., the Phoenicians developed a simple alphabetic script for use in managing their commercial trading empire. The new alphabet, which spread throughout the Near East and Southwest Asia and was later adopted by the Greeks, forms the basis of the modern alphabet used throughout the Western world. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

to record their business transactions. However, cuneiform was cumbersome because it required a working knowledge of 500 to 1,000 symbols, each of which represented a unique word or idea. Between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E., the Phoenicians developed a much simpler form of writing to manage their growing trade. The Phoenician writing system was made up of 22 letters, each of which stood for a unique spoken sound. It was easy to learn and could be used to record any spoken language.

The new alphabet was eventually adopted by other peoples, who recognized its superiority over cuneiform and other writing systems based on **pictographs**, such as Egyptian **hieroglyphics**. The Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet around 800 B.C.E.; later, the Romans and other cultures in the region adapted it to their own languages. Today, most of the peoples of the Western world and Middle East write in an alphabet directly or indirectly based on that of the Phoenicians.

DECLINE

The Phoenician trade empire flourished for some 400 years, but political developments in the region led to its gradual demise. In the ninth century B.C.E., the Assyrian Empire in northern Mesopotamia began to expand west toward the Mediterranean. One by one, the Phoenician cities along the coast fell. Only Tyre remained free, largely due to its defensive fleet. By the eighth century B.C.E., the Greeks had expanded their own trade activities and captured markets in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas formerly dominated by the Phoenicians.

The Persians conquered the remaining Phoenician city-states by 538 B.C.E. Phoenicia slowly declined

as a commercial center under the Persians, a land-based empire that had little naval or maritime tradition. The city of Sidon did prosper under the Persians, but that was because it was used as a launching point for Persian invasions of Egypt and Greece. Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), who invaded Phoenicia in 333 B.C.E., was more interested in promoting Greek commercial trade, and Phoenicia's importance as a trading center declined rapidly thereafter. Carthage alone continued to prosper until it was defeated by Rome in the Second Punic War (218–202 B.C.E.) and destroyed by Rome in the Third Punic War (149–146 B.C.E.).

See also: Assyria; Hittites; Language and Writing.

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Religion

Ancient Southwest Asia and the Near East was not only the birthplace of material advances such as writing, the wheel, and the first cities, but it also produced the world's earliest formal religions. Some of these faiths, including the **polytheistic** religions of ancient Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria, were derived from and retained many aspects of earlier **animistic** religions. Other religions, including Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, were **monotheistic** faiths that acknowledged the presence of a single god said to have created and ruled over the universe.

DEITIES IN NATURE

The hunter-gatherers who inhabited Mesopotamia before the development of agriculture encountered nature in an intimate and immediate manner. Survival must have seemed to them a daily challenge leveled by divine forces against humankind. As a result, early religions in Southwest Asia and the Near East tended to be animistic, centered around the belief that spirits inhabited natural objects, such as streams, trees, or animals.

As hunting and gathering gave way to a settled agricultural lifestyle, the concept of spirits inhabiting natural objects was gradually replaced by the notion of gods and goddesses associated with specific aspects of nature or human behavior. These included deities of the sun, wind, water, reproduction, love, and war. The early civilizations of Mesopotamia, including those of the Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, worshipped the same basic **pantheon** of gods. Among the most important of these were An, god of the heavens; Ki, the earth goddess; Enlil, god of the air; Enki, god of the deep waters; Nanna, god of the moon; Utu, god of the sun and justice; and Inanna, goddess of love and war.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RITUALS

Because the Mesopotamian deities were thought to control the forces of nature, damaging natural events, such as thunderstorms or floods, were attributed to the anger of the gods. Ancient Mesopotamians thus considered it essential that all people find a way to appease the gods in order to protect the community from divine wrath. This was accomplished through the performance of public and private rituals.

Public rituals in early Mesopotamian cities often focused on the worship of the city's patron god. For example, Enlil was the patron god of the city of Nippur, while Nanna was the patron goddess of Ur. The most important structure in each **city-state**, the *ziggurat*, was dedicated to the patron deity. The ziggurat was a massive building consisting of a series

of levels, each one smaller than the one below it. At the top of the ziggurat stood a temple dedicated to the patron deity. Daily sacrifices were conducted at the temple to honor and placate the deity. Although built by residents of the community, the ziggurat and altar areas were sacred spaces, and only priests were allowed to ascend to the temple to offer sacrifices.

Every Mesopotamian house had a separate area containing a shrine to household gods who were believed to watch over the home. It also contained a space for burying deceased family members. Ancient Mesopotamians believed that the spirits of dead family members stayed close to their families. It was the family's responsibility to feed the dead and provide them with whatever they might need in the afterlife. In return, the dead were to look after and protect the family's interests.

MONOTHEISTIC FAITHS

In contrast to animistic and nature-based polytheistic religions, Mesopotamia also produced the world's first and most widely adopted monotheistic faiths. These religions professed the existence of a single, all-powerful god whose power was not limited to influence over a single aspect of nature. They were based on the ethical struggle between good and evil rather than on the physical struggle for survival in an uncertain climate.

Zoroastrianism

The earliest of the region's monotheistic faiths was Zoroastrianism, which takes its name from the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra), who lived sometime between the eighteenth and sixth centuries B.C.E. It is based on the eternal struggle between Ahura Mazda, the god of light and creation, and Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman, the spirit of evil. Zoroastrianism preaches the existence of an eternal law, or order, known as *asha*, which is in a constant struggle with *druj*—interpreted variously as decay, disorder, or nothingness.

Humans, who actively participate in this struggle, have a duty to promote and defend asha. They do this by following the central precepts of Zoroastrianism, which include treating all people equally, regardless of gender or race; respecting all living things; hard work; charity; and loyalty to family and friends. The ideas of asha and druj are not perfectly equivalent to the notions of good and evil. However, the qualities that promote asha are those that the other major monotheistic religions typically associate with goodness and morality.

Zoroastrianism was widely practiced in the Persian Empire, and its impact on Persian foreign policy is clear in the reigns of Cyrus II, the Great (r. ca. 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.), Cambyses III (r. ca. 530–522 B.C.E.), and Darius I, the Great (r. 522–486 B.C.E), who practiced religious tolerance toward conquered peoples. After Cyrus defeated the Babylonians in 539 B.C.E., he allowed the Jews, who had been forced into exile by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., to return to their homes and to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.

Judaism

Judaism traces its roots to southern Mesopotamia around 1800 B.C.E. According to the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, the **patriarch** Abraham, who lived in the Mesopotamian city-state of Ur, established a covenant with the supreme deity, Yahweh. Yahweh promised to make the Jews his chosen people if they accepted him as God, complied with his will, and bore the sign of the covenant, male circumcision.

The biblical account states that Abraham led the Jews out of Ur into Canaan, the land he promised them as part of his covenant. A famine later caused the Jews to seek refuge in Egypt, where they lived peacefully until a pharaoh who was hostile to the immigrants enslaved them. However, Moses, a Jew raised as a member of the pharaoh's family, emerged as a champion of Jewish freedom. Moses asked Yahweh to bring a series of plagues on Egypt, until the pharaoh finally agreed to free the Jews. The biblical book of Exodus describes the Jewish captivity in Egypt and the Jews' subsequent quest to return to Canaan.

The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the scripture known as the Torah, set down the basic tenets of Judaism. At its core are the laws of ethical behavior called the Ten Commandments, which Jews believe Yahweh presented to the Hebrew patriarch and prophet Moses. The commandments

The Dome of the Rock, the mosque in Jerusalem believed to be the place where the prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven to receive the prayers of Islam from God, is one of the holiest sites for Muslims. The Mount of Olives, seen in the background, is equally sacred to Christians as the site where Roman soldiers are said to have seized Jesus of Nazareth before crucifying him. (Rohan/Stone/Getty Images)

condemn unethical actions that harm others—for example, murder, theft, adultery, and false witness—as well as more private thoughts or actions such as coveting another person's possessions or dishonoring one's parents. In addition to the Ten Commandments, the Torah contains an extensive set of laws pertaining to specifics of religious observances, marriage and family relations, social customs, and dietary practices that govern the actions of Jews.

The remainder of the Hebrew scriptures tell the history of the Kingdom of Israel, established by the Jews upon their return to Canaan. They also include books containing poetry, the teachings of prophets, the actions of wise leaders known as judges, and other writings intended for moral instruction, such as the Book of Job. This book describes how Yahweh severely tests the faith of a devout believer, continually placing him in a series of seemingly hopeless predicaments. These later books do not have the same importance as the Torah, but Jews nonetheless hold them in great reverence.

While the polytheistic faiths of the region easily accommodated other gods within their pantheons, Judaism refused to acknowledge the existence of any god except Yahweh. This became a source of ongoing conflict between the Hebrews and the imperial powers of ancient Southwest Asia. The Babylonian Exile that was ended by Cyrus II was the result of the Hebrews' refusal to worship Marduk, the principal Babylonian deity. Three times during the first and second centuries C.E., the Hebrews revolted against the Roman Empire, which allowed the practice of local religion but also required yearly sacrifices to the Roman gods. After putting down the third revolt in C.E. 135, the Romans destroyed the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem and forced most of the Jewish population into exile, an event known as

RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN THE NEAR EAST AND SOUTHWEST ASIA

CA. 1800 B.C.E. Abraham and Sarah, the ancestors of the Jews, or people of Israel, said to have lived in the Mesopotamian city-state of Ur, according to the Hebrew Bible

CA. 1700–500 B.C.E. Prophet Zarathustra founds Zoroastrian faith in Persia (modern-day Iran)

CA. 1250 B.C.E. Prophet Moses, sometimes thought of as "founder" said to have written the Torah, or first five books of the Hebrew Bible

586 B.C.E. Babylonian Exile begins as Jews from Kingdom of Judah are dispersed throughout the Babylonian Empire for refusal to worship Babylonian gods

CA. 538 B.C.E. Babylonian captivity ends after Persian king Cyrus II, the Great (r. ca 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.), conquers the Babylonian Empire and allows Jews to return home to southern kingdom of Judah

CA. C.E. 27–30 Jesus of Nazareth preaches ideas that form basis of the Christian religion

C.E. 610–613 The prophet Muhammad introduces the Islamic faith in Arabian Peninsula

C.E. 632 Death of the prophet Muhammad

the **Diaspora**. Jews would not return in large numbers to the region for more than 1,800 years.

Christianity

In about C.E. 27, an itinerant preacher named Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 B.C.E.–ca. C.E. 30) established a popular ministry in the Roman province of Judea (modern-day Israel), calling for a return to the basic ethical concepts of Judaism. Jesus claimed the Jewish law as the basis for his teachings, but he stated that two commandments were greater than all the others: to love God with all one's heart and mind and to love others as oneself. He was contemptuous of those who followed the outward rituals of the Jewish faith while living a life that betrayed its underlying principles of communal responsibility.

Jesus saved some of his harshest condemnations for Jewish religious leaders, calling them "hypocrites" for not emphasizing communal responsibility for its poorest members. He believed that many leaders cared little about the Jewish people and were chiefly concerned with maintaining the power and wealth they enjoyed. At the same time, Jesus preached that the poor, meek, and powerless were God's true chosen people. The wealthy and powerful, he argued, had received their reward in this world; those who suffered but still remained faithful to Yahweh would enter paradise in the next world.

According to the Gospels, four texts written 30 to 60 years after Jesus's death that describe his life and teachings, Jesus also performed several miracles. These purportedly included restoring sight to the blind and even raising a man from the dead. Jesus's reputation grew to the point that many of his followers came to believe that he was the Messiah, a savior promised in the Hebrew scriptures, who would free the Jewish people from foreign domination. To many of the faithful, Jesus was not simply the messiah, but the son of God.

Jewish religious leaders were outraged at such claims, which they saw not only as blasphemy but also as a challenge to their authority. When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration in about the year C.E. 30, Roman officials, fearing a clash between the Jewish authorities and Jesus's followers, arrested Jesus. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, subsequently sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion.

To the chagrin of many religious and government leaders, Jesus' death seemed only to increase his popularity and status. Three days after the execution, Jesus' followers claimed that he rose from the dead. Those who embraced this idea began actively to spread Jesus' teachings first throughout Judea and then Asia Minor. Over time, a new religion, Christianity, emerged from the Jewish roots of Jesus' teachings. Although Christianity retained the underlying ethical and moral teachings of Judaism, it abandoned many of the faith's traditional dietary laws and practices, including circumcision. This decision, promoted by the early church father Saint Paul, made the faith more acceptable and accessible to non-Jews, known as Gentiles.

By the third century C.E., Christianity had penetrated to virtually every corner of the Roman Empire. It gained a large following, particularly among the poor and among marginalized members of society, including many women. However, like the Jews, Christians refused to acknowledge or worship any other god, which aroused suspicion and hostility among pagan Romans. Several Roman emperors took advantage of anti-Christian sympathies to blame Christians for imperial economic and social misfortunes. Nero used them as scapegoats, claiming that Christians set the fire that destroyed much of Rome in C.E. 64, and he had many publicly put to death on that charge.

The accession of Emperor Constantine I (r. C.E. 306–337) marked a turning point in the fortunes of Christianity. Constantine, who was emperor of the eastern portion of the Roman Empire, claimed sole possession of the throne by defeating the western emperor, Maxentius, at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in C.E. 306. The night before the battle, Constantine reported seeing a vision of a cross accompanied by the words "In hoc signo vinces" ("In this sign you shall conquer"). He took that as a sign that the Christian God would lead him to victory the next day. His subsequent triumph left Constantine sole emperor of Rome, and ensured the survival of Christianity. In C.E. 313, Constantine passed the Edict of Milan, which declared official toleration of all religions, including Christianity, in the empire.

Freed from state persecution, the Christian faith grew rapidly into an institution whose influence replaced that of the failing Roman emperors. By the time the western half of the Roman Empire fell in the late fifth century C.E., the Catholic Christian Church based on Rome was the most powerful institution in Europe. However, the church itself was experiencing internal disputes over **doctrine** and leadership. The bishop of Rome considered himself the spiritual leader of all Christendom, but

TURNING POINT

The Unifying Power of Islam

Islam was more than a religion. It was a powerful political force that united the quarrelling tribes of Arabia and enabled them to spread their beliefs throughout Southwest Asia. The world in which Islam's founder Muhammad (C.E. 570–632) lived was one of distrust and social inequality. People fled to the cities for protection against nomadic bandits, but once there, they were exploited by the wealthy and **aristocratic** urban elite. Muhammad felt the need for something to bring unity, comfort, and purpose to the Arab people. Islam represented this unifying force. It required Muslims to put tribal allegiances aside and to form a community, or *ummah*, where race and social class did not matter. Tolerance and compromise were to replace the dominance of one element of society over another.

As Arab armies conquered most of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and Iberia (modern-day Spain and Portugal) in the seventh and eighth centuries C.E., they came to rule over a diverse group of peoples. Arab soldiers and merchants brought Islamic law, religious beliefs, and social customs to these conquered lands, where they spread rapidly. Shared Islamic culture, including the common use of the Arabic language, facilitated trade, communication, and travel throughout the Muslim world, producing perhaps the most literate and scientifically advanced society of its day.

many bishops in the surviving Eastern Roman Empire considered all bishops to have equal authority over their local congregations. This power struggle aggravated existing differences in ritual and certain tenets of the faith, and led eventually to a break, or schism, between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church in C.E. 1054.

Islam

Islam originated in the Arabian Peninsula between C.E. 610 and 613, at a time when the region was torn by tribal rivalries and warfare between the nomadic communities and those living in cities. The tribal leaders who ruled Arabia pitted different social factions—rich and poor, city-dwellers and nomads—against one another to weaken potential rivals and maintain their hold on power. They also ignored the plight of poorer and weaker members of society who often were exploited and mistreated.

The prophet Muhammad (C.E. 570–632), a successful Arab merchant living in the city of Mecca, was greatly troubled by the violence and greed that surrounded him. In C.E. 610, Muhammad had a religious experience in which he said that Allah (the Arabic name for God) revealed to him the teachings that eventually developed into Islam.

Islam is based on five principles, or pillars. The first and most basic of these is the *shahadah*, a declaration that that there is only one God and that Muhammad is God's messenger. The other pillars include *salat*, the obligation to pray five times a day and a sixth prayer on Fridays; *zakat*, or alms-giving; *sawm*, or fasting from sunup to sundown during the month of Ramadan; and *hajj*, the obligation to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during one's lifetime. Islam's ethical principles focus on a concern for just treatment of others, as well as submission to Allah's will. The very word *Islam* means "surrender" or "submission" in Arabic.

Islamic precepts closely parallel the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity, which Muslims see as predecessors to Islam in a single great prophetic tradition. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last of a line of prophets that included the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham and Moses, as well as Jesus of Nazareth. Many of the stories that appear in Hebrew scriptures and Christian Gospels are also included in variant versions in the Muslim holy book, the Koran. Muslims claim that the Jews and Christians did not completely comprehend the revealed word of Allah, which accounts for the differences in the three sources. Muslims regard Judaism and Christianity as related religious traditions to be respected and tolerated. By contrast, Islam condemns all polytheistic and animistic religions as forms of idolatry, or idol worship.

Muhammad earned the anger of the Arab tribal leaders by publicly criticizing their corruption, cruelty, and indifference. By C.E. 622, hostility toward Muhammad in Mecca (including reported attempts on his life), forced him to move to the city of Yathrib (now Medina). There he became a leading figure by reconciling two rival tribal factions and uniting them under the banner of Islam. Within two years, Muhammad and his followers in Medina were at war with the tribal leaders in Mecca. After years of war interrupted by a brief and ultimately suspended truce, Muhammad conquered Mecca in C.E. 630. Ultimately he was able to unite the Arabian Peninsula under Muslim rule thus marking the beginning of a dramatic expansion of the faith.

In the decades following Muhammad's death in C.E. 632, Muslim armies and merchants under the Umayyad Dynasty carried Islam throughout Southwest Asia and the Near East, eastward into what is now Pakistan and India, and west across North Africa and into Iberia (modern-day Spain and Portugal). In C.E. 750, however, the rival Abbasid Dynasty overthrew Umayyad rule everywhere except Iberia. The Abbasids ruled over the so-called Dar-al-Islam ("community of Islam") until falling to Mongol invaders in C.E. 1258. As it happened, Islam proved more resilient than the Mongols, most of whom settled in the newly conquered lands and over time converted to the Muslim faith.

The Islamic state founded by Muhammad grew into the last, and largest, great empire of ancient Southwest Asia and the Near East. For nearly 1,200 years, Islam was the dominant religious, cultural, political, and military force in the region. Although its political and military clout waned steadily after the seventeenth century C.E., Islam remains to this day the region's most significant and enduring cultural and religious influence.

See also: Art and Architecture; Assyria; Babylonia; Christianity; Darius I, the Great; Islam; Jews and Judaism; Mesopotamia; Sumer; Ur; Zoroastrianism.

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Sargon the Great *See* Babylonia; Sumer.

Scythians

Fierce nomadic tribe of horsemen that lived in the lands north of the Black and Caspian seas from the seventh through first centuries B.C.E. The Danube River served as an unofficial western border of the Scythian domain, and the Don River marked the easternmost extent of their territory. The Scythians are noted for being among the first people to domesticate the horse.

The Scythians' military skills and tactics made them famous in an age of great armies. Although they rode horses with no saddles or stirrups, their archers were able to turn and shoot at those behind them while riding at full gallop. Scythian women often fought alongside the men and may have been the basis for the Greek myth of the Amazons, a race of fierce female warriors. As nomads, the Scythians were uninterested in conquering and holding new territories. Instead, they fought invaders to defend tribal honor or to protect their ancestral lands. This greatly influenced their fighting style, which depended more on hit-and-run raids than extended set-piece battles. When the Persian king Darius I, the Great (r. 522–486 B.C.E.), invaded Scythia in 514 B.C.E., he was frustrated by the Scythians' refusal to meet his army in battle.

Scythian art and religion reflect Scythians' intimate relationship with and reverence for nature. Their jewelry and other **artifacts** featured stylized representations of animals including the horse, stag, bear, wolf, eagle, and fish. The Scythians practiced an **animistic** religion, in which holy men known as shamans intervened between the spirit world and the world of the living. Amulets meant to ward off evil provide evidence that the Scythians believed in magic and witchcraft.

Because the Scythians were illiterate, what is known of their history primarily comes from two kinds of sources: archeological evidence found in tombs located in modern-day Russia and Kazakhstan, and Persian and Greek sources, including the fifth-century B.C.E. Greek historian Herodotus. With their mastery of horseback warfare, the Scythians controlled the steppes of Central Asia from the fifth through the third centuries B.C.E.

During this time, the Scythians divided into two groups. One group settled in the area of modern-day Ukraine and the other occupied the Crimean Peninsula. Both ultimately abandoned the nomadic lifestyle, taking up farming and herding, and profiting from the slave trade between northern Greece and the Black Sea. Adopting a settled lifestyle may have weakened the Scythians. In

LINK TO PLACE

Scythian Cultures in Central Asia

Most modern scholars base their understanding of the origin of the Scythians on the fifth-century B.C.E. writings of the Greek historian Herodotus. His account gives several versions of Scythian origins. The one Herodotus believed, and which is widely accepted today, claims that the Scythians originally inhabited Central Asia but were pushed out as a result of conflict with a nomadic steppe tribe called the Massagetae. These rivals of the Scythians were one of a number of tribes in the region described by Herodotus and other **classical** writers. Because the tribes shared a common nomadic lifestyle, scholars often refer to them as "Scythian cultures."

The Massagetae of Iran and the Scythians shared many common customs——from their dress to their reliance on their herds and their skill at working with gold. Both the Massagetae and Scyhtians practiced **monogamy**, but, unlike the Scythians, all Massagetae wives were held in common by the tribe.

The Issedones, another of the so-called Scythian cultures, also figure in one of the myths of Scythian origins. According to that legend, it was the Issedones, who lived east of the Scythians, who forced the Scythians out of Central Asia. Herodotus reported that the Issedones, like the Massagetae, held their wives in common. Similar customs regarding marriage existed until quite recently in parts of Tibet, suggesting that country as a possible location for the Issedones' homeland. The Issedones also practiced a custom that would strike most people today as bizarre. They killed elderly male members of the tribe and held a ritual feast at which the victim's family ate his flesh. Afterwards, they gilded his skull (covered it with a thin coating of goal) and revered it as a shrine.

the third century B.C.E., groups including the Celts in the Balkans and the Sarmatians in Russia took over the areas formerly dominated by the Scythians. By the first century B.C.E., the Scythians had disappeared.

See also: Darius I, the Great; Persia.

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Slavery

Slavery was widespread in ancient Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt, where those enslaved performed domestic and agricultural tasks without compensation and also worked on major public building projects. However, slavery was not common in the Indus River valley, where other forms of labor control, such as serfdom (by which peasants are bound to a specific piece of land), ensured the presence of an agricultural workforce.

Slavery was a well-established practice by the time the first Sumerian cities arose in southern Mesopotamia in the late fourth millennium B.C.E. Warfare was the earliest source of slaves in ancient Sumer; soldiers and citizens captured in warfare were enslaved by the state. The Sumerian name for

a female slave was "mountain girl," while a male slave was a "mountain man." Given the flat topography of southern Mesopotamia, these terms suggest that foreigners made up the bulk of the slave population. Prisoners of war continued to comprise a large percentage of the slaves of later societies such as those of the Babylonians and Assyrians.

Not all slaves, however, came from outside the host society. In most ancient Mesopotamian societies, there were several ways an individual might become enslaved. A man who could not pay his debts might give his wife or children as slaves to his creditors. In some instances, a debtor with no family would make himself the slave of his creditor to work off the amount owed. The law code established by the Babylonian king Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E.) established slavery as a punishment for criminal offenses, with the money from a person's sale going to compensate the victims. Finally, persons born to slaves were themselves slaves.

Although slaves were legally considered property and typically had no rights, they appear to have been relatively well treated. In Persia and Babylon, educated slaves often became tutors to their owner's children, and many achieved positions of significant authority and responsibility. Under Jewish law, slaves had limited rights and were not to be injured or killed. Among Muslims, any slave who converted to Islam had to be immediately set free. Owners in all of these cultures sometimes granted freedom to favorite slaves in their wills.

Slaves were the property of their owner, and only their owner could set them free. In Mesopotamia, runaways were severely punished, as was anyone who aided them. The Code of Hammurabi clearly stated that the Babylonian government would execute anyone who tried to free another man's slave. In addition, anyone who injured or killed a slave owed the owner compensation for damage to or loss of property.

See also: Hammurabi; Islam; Jews and Judaism; Zoroastrianism.

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Society

The nature of society—or the institutions that distinguish one group of people from another—in the Near East and Southwestern Asia was shaped by the transition from a strictly nomadic to a largely agricultural existence. Prior to the invention of agriculture around 8000 B.C.E., the peoples of the region organized themselves into tribes with loose social structures bound by blood ties. The advent of settled farming communities led to the development of urban societies, with much greater social **stratification**, where survival depended upon mutual cooperation.

TRIBAL SOCIETY

Nomadic groups in Southwest Asia organized themselves into tribes. The most notable examples of tribal groups in the ancient period include the Scythians, the Jews before the Babylonian Captivity (ca. 586–ca. 538 B.C.E.), and pre-Islamic Arabs (prior to C.E. 613). While each of these groups had a unique history, they shared certain elements of their social organization.

Because these peoples were **pastoral** nomads, they organized themselves into small groups that could be supported on the limited natural resources the people could gather. Small tribal groups were united by ties of blood and kinship. For example, by 1700 B.C.E., the Jews had divided into 12 tribes, each

said to be descendents of the sons of Jacob, grandson of the **patriarch** Abraham. In this society, the chieftains were military and judicial leaders, acting as the final voice in tribal disputes, and Jewish leaders claimed authority based on their military prowess.

Women in Tribal Society

In tribal societies, women tended to be treated more as equals than they were in later urban-based societies. They helped look after the animals each group raised and fought side by side with the men. Scythian women, for example, were noted for their skills in battle. Jewish law dictated that men and women were to be treated equally. Jewish women also served as prophets and queens, providing examples of moral leadership and group loyalty.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, by contrast, women had fewer rights. Women supplied labor, but men made all the decisions for them. If a woman was unmarried, she was under the authority of her father; if married, she submitted to her husband; when widowed, she was subordinate to her eldest son. Women were not permitted to inherit property and were dependent upon family members for support. This ensured that any accumulated wealth remained within the husband's family and was not taken by the woman into a second marriage.

Honor

Honor, an important guiding principle in tribal groups, is based on the concepts of honesty and integrity. For example, in Jewish and Arabian tribes, honor required anyone who asked for shelter to be treated as a guest and protected from harm. This concept is exemplified by the Biblical story of Lot, who refused to turn over his guests to the angry citizens of Sodom. Familial codes of honor also required that any violence done to a family member be revenged by the tribe against the offender and his family. Honor also extended to the grave. When a Scythian chieftain died, it was considered an honor for his warriors and his favorite wife or concubine to drink poison so that they could serve him in the afterlife.

The concept of honor was particularly important in regard to the tribe's women. A woman's honor was tied to her sexual modesty. She was expected to remain a virgin until married, and once married she was to avoid contact with men other than her husband. This was meant to ensure that she would not be sexually promiscuous, give birth to a child out of wedlock, or use her husband's resources to raise another man's child. In pre-Islamic Arab communities, a woman who had been raped or found guilty of adultery would be killed by her family to preserve their honor, as would any illegitimate child to whom she gave birth.

URBAN SOCIETY

The transition from a nomadic to a sedentary, or settled, lifestyle led to much more complex social organization. The invention of agriculture allowed societies to increase food production while using fewer human resources. This freed up a segment of the population to pursue more specialized activities such as pottery, weaving, and metalwork. The evolution of more complex societies also led to the development of ruling and priestly classes to organize and guide group efforts. Over time, separate social classes based on control of wealth and political power emerged in the civilizations of Southwest Asia.

Social Classes

The Sumerians, who established the world's first true civilization in the late fourth millennium B.C.E., developed a **hierarchical** society consisting of three basic classes: nobles, commoners, and slaves. Each of these groups was further divided into sub-classes.

The king was the most important of the nobles. His power was based on his military leadership, his role as human representative of the chief deity, and his membership in the ruling dynasty. Kings made and enforced laws, oversaw building projects, and led armies into battle. Mesopotamian kings frequently participated in religious rituals, and art from early Mesopotamia often depicts kings as standing at the side of the gods. For example, the code of laws created by the Babylonian king Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E.), dating to about 1786 B.C.E., was chiseled into a stone slab that bore an image of Hammurabi receiving the laws from the god Shamash.

From ancient Mesopotamia, the cylinder seal and imprint shown here are attributed to the cult of the gods Marduk and Nabu. Seals were a principal form of identification in the ancient Near East and Southwest Asia. Each seal contained a unique image that its owner imprinted in wet clay on documents to verify their originality and authenticity. (© Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

The king was assisted generally by two groups: a council of elders and the priests of the dominant deity. The elders were men with experience in both military and administrative matters. For example, such a council was referred to in the Mesopotamian creation story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The priesthood was charged with making certain that the king's actions complied with divine will. The priests helped the king understand messages sent to him in dreams, sought out omens or portents that would support or guide the king, and prayed for him. Beneath the king and his advisors was the royal bureaucracy: judges, tax collectors, and scribes.

In Sumerian society, 90 percent of the population was involved in growing food, raising animals, or producing finished goods such as hides, pottery, metalwork, and **textiles**. This work was done primarily by free commoners. Farmers were the most respected group of commoners, because of their role in supplying food to the population. Merchants, on the other hand, while necessary to conduct commerce and increase the wealth of society, were less well respected. They were seen as making a living not by the sweat of their brow but on the efforts of others who actually produced what the merchants sold.

Slaves formed the lowest class of Mesopotamian society. In ancient Mesopotamia, slavery was not based on race or ethnicity; rather it was typically a consequence of economic or political misfortune. An individual might become enslaved after being captured in war, breaking the law, or accumulating debt that he or she was unable to pay. A person could sell himself into debt-slavery in order to pay off substantial sums owed to creditors. Once the debt was paid, the individual was freed from bondage. Slaves generally worked in the fields, tended animals, and fought in the army.

Concern for maintenance of the social order was outlined in many Mesopotamian political and religious documents, but nowhere as clearly in the Code of Hammurabi. Under the code, punishment was based on the social status of the victim and the assailant. Individuals of lower status typically received more severe punishments for legal trans-

LINK TO PLACE

Carpets in Traditional Societies

The Near East and Southwest Asia long has been renowned for the beautiful and intricate woven carpets produced by regional **artisans**. When Cyrus II, the Great, King of Persia (r. ca. 559–ca. 530 B.C.E.), conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E., intricate fine wool and cotton rugs were part of the spoils of war. In fact, Cyrus, who made the Persian Empire the center of the art of carpet weaving, was buried with carpets made with golden threads.

The oldest surviving rug from the region is a six-foot-square (1.8-m) piece that dates to about 300 B.C.E. Its design, which depicts men on horseback and walking alongside their horses, mimics themes carved in stone at the Persian royal palace at Persepolis. Carpets with similar scenes are mentioned in the *Avesta*, the second-century B.C.E. collection of Zoroastrian sacred texts. Vivid images of flowers and gardens were also popular themes in the arid landscape of the region.

Islam significantly influenced the patterns used in these carpets. Sunni Muslims took seriously the Koran's prohibition against creating idols. Thus, images of humans, animals, or even plants, which might be taken for gods, were forbidden in Sunni Muslim art. As a result, Sunni carpet designs featured geometric patterns and passages from the Koran in Arabic script. Shi'a Muslims were less strict, allowing the use of floral images. However, humans and animals were still prohibited, and geometric patterns also tended to dominate Shi'a carpet designs. Despite geographic separation, similar designs have been unearthed from different societies across the region.

gressions and were entitled to smaller compensation when wronged than were higher-status individuals. For example, lower-class offenders were usually executed for harming someone of a higher social class. By contrast, a higher-status person who harmed one of lower status might be ordered to compensate the victim's family monetarily. The law provided special protection for women and children who were considered to be the weakest members of Mesopotamian society, being unable to physically protect themselves and having no direct access to the legal system.

Women

Regardless of social status, women had little power and influence in Mesopotamian society. Fathers chose whom their daughters would marry. Husbands decided how to handle property that their wives brought into a marriage. Sons decided the fate of their widowed mothers. By contrast, women could not own property. They worked in and around the house, cooking, cleaning, and raising food for the family's table. They raised the children and maintained the offerings made to the spirits of deceased family members.

This is not to suggest that women played no public role in society. They often participated in occupations that derived from their duties at home. For example, women brewed beer for household consumption, and often sold the surplus in public or to a tavern. Women who worked in the fields also sold food raised on the family farm in public stalls. However, working in public brought into question a woman's moral behavior and made her vulnerable to physical attack. Hammurabi's law code severely punished men who raped, attacked, or stole from a woman, and death was ordered for any person who raped a pregnant woman.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Urban societies were united not by the blood ties that bound the tribal societies but by their mutual pursuit of economic prosperity. That prosperity typically was based on trade. The civilizations of ancient Southwest Asia fought to gain access to natural resources such as the iron, gold, and copper deposits of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and Egypt and the cedar forests of modern-day Lebanon and Cyprus. They also competed for access to foreign markets in which to sell their goods.

The importance of trade drove the Phoenicians to dominate shipping on the Mediterranean Sea from about 1200 to 800 B.C.E. and encouraged the Lydians of Anatolia to mint the first coins in the seventh century B.C.E. The Macedonian king Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), invaded Persia in 330 B.C.E. not just for military glory but also to add Persia's wealth and markets to his growing empire.

Trade also encouraged the social and cultural exchange that spread new ideas, innovations, and religious beliefs throughout the region. In this way, trade helped to provide a common ground for cooperation and understanding between societies in a region that was often beset by war and conflict.

See also: Hammurabi; Lydians; Mesopotamia; Slavery; Technology and Inventions.

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Sumer

The world's earliest settled civilization, which arose in southern Mesopotamia, dating to the mid-sixth millennium B.C.E. By the late fourth millennium, the world's first urban centers appeared there.

Archeologists believe that the earliest Sumerians were a farming people who inhabited northern Mesopotamia before moving south as early as 5200 B.C.E. The region's arid climate and limited water resources required the development of effective irrigation systems to sustain an agricultural lifestyle. Creating and maintaining such systems required a high degree of social organization that eventually enabled the growth of increasingly larger permanent settlements.

The surplus food generated by these settlements permitted a portion of the population to devote itself to duties other than food production. Ruling and priestly classes emerged to organize and direct labor, and **artisans** such as pottery makers, weavers, and metalsmiths developed specialized skills to produce luxury and trade goods. By the mid-fifth millennium B.C.E., Sumerians had developed a flourishing trade along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Some time before 3000 B.C.E., the wealth generated by trade enabled local rulers to found the first cities based around central temple complexes.

GOVERNMENT, RELIGION, AND SOCIETY

The Sumerian civilization consisted of a dozen **city-states** located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the largest of which were Ur, Uruk, Lagash, and Kish. A city-state was self-governing city, usually guarded by defensive walls, and the agricultural lands surrounding it. The most important structure in a Sumerian city was the *ziggurat*, a monumental building atop which was located a temple dedicated to the city's patron god. The patron god of Ur, for example, was the moon god, Nanna. A statue of the god, who was believed to look after the welfare of the city, was located in the temple.

Sumerian society was highly organized and **hierarchical**. At the top was the king who served as both the head of the government and the commander of the military. Although accepted by the people as the representative of the city's patron god, the king was not considered divine. The king was advised by priests who served the patron god, and by a council of elders. Approximately 10 percent of

the city's population worked as merchants or produced goods such as pottery, leather goods, and **textiles** for local consumption as well as for trade. Ninety percent of the population worked to produce food. Slavery was common, and foreigners captured in warfare worked in a wide range of menial tasks, particularly agriculture and construction.

ENDURING CONTRIBUTIONS

The Sumerians made some of the most significant contributions to early human civilization. In the fifth century B.C.E., the Sumerians are believed to have invented the wheel, which they used not only for transportation (by the mid-fourth millennium B.C.E.), but also for use in making pottery. Before the invention of the wheel, potters generally created their pieces by coiling strips of wet clay and stacking the coiled strips atop one another. This technique limited the size and shapes of pots that could be produced. The pottery wheel allowed artisans to work with larger lumps of clay that could be rotated on the wheel and shaped with both hands. This enabled them to form larger pots with thinner, yet sturdier, walls in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Around 3100 B.C.E., the Sumerians developed a system of writing called **cuneiform**, originally used to record commercial transactions. The uses of writing eventually expanded to include business contracts, legal decrees, religious rites and beliefs, and the stories and myths of the people. The most famous of these stories, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, is considered the world's first epic poem. Later Mesopotamian civilizations, including the Babylonian and Assyrians, adopted the use of cuneiform, which served as the region's principal writing system for nearly 2,000 years.

INVASION, RECOVERY, AND DECLINE

Although the Sumerian city-states belonged to a single civilization, there was little permanent cooperation among them. Control of scarce resources, territorial expansion, and control over trade routes were sources of frequent disputes and conflicts. This constant fighting, and the inability of the city-states to share resources or unite for common defense, made Sumer vulnerable to attack from its

TURNING POINT

Cuneiform

The world's first written script, called **cuneiform**, was developed in Sumer around 3100 B.C.E. The word *cuneiform* means "wedge-shaped," referring to the series of marks that comprised each of the symbols in later versions of the system. The earliest version of cuneiform used **pictographs** that were drawn to resemble the words they represented. However, creating these elaborate symbols was difficult and time-consuming. To speed the task of writing, the symbols became simpler and more abstract, eventually appearing as groups of wedge-shaped marks arranged in various patterns.

Scribes wrote by pressing a stylus, a smooth stick with a slanted tip, into a wet clay tablet. The wedged shape of the tip created the characteristic cuneiform pattern. When finished, the scribe left the tablet in the sun to dry, thus making the record permanent. This method of recordkeeping prevented alterations from being made to the **inscription**. Any sign of tampering would leave scratch marks in the dried clay. The clay tablets were also relatively immune from fire or flood damage.

The Babylonians adopted and spread the use of Sumerian cuneiform, which remained the principal writing system in Southwest Asia until the Phoenicians introduced the first phonetic alphabet around 1200 B.C.E. This much simpler system used just 22 symbols instead of the 500 to 1,000 symbols in cuneiform. In addition, the letters of the alphabet could be combined to produce virtually any sound, making it much more flexible for communicating in foreign languages. The spread of the alphabet doomed cuneiform to obsolescence. The last recorded cuneiform document dates to C.E. 75.

neighbors. The Akkadians, who dominated the region northwest of Sumer under their king Sargon (r. ca. 2334–ca. 2279 B.C.E.) of Akkad, conquered Sumer around 2330 B.C.E. Sargon united the Sumerian city-states with his kingdom in northern Mesopotamia, forming an empire that extended from the Persian Gulf to parts of present-day Turkey.

Around 2150 B.C.E., the Akkadian Empire was invaded by the Gutians, a nomadic tribe from the Zagros Mountains in what is now Iran. This led to a period of instability in the region, as the Gutians were not equipped to rule over a complex society such as had developed in Sumer. A new Sumerian dynasty arose when Ur-Nammu (r. ca. 2065–ca. 2047 B.C.E.) restored Sumerian control over the region. Fragments of clay tablets dating to his reign contain remnants of the world's oldest known law code. Ur-Nammu was succeeded by his son, Shulgi (r. 2047–1999 B.C.E.), who greatly expanded the network of roads that facilitated trade throughout the empire.

The remaining Sumerian kings were unremarkable rulers, and in 1957 B.C.E., the Elamites, who lived east of Sumer, invaded and took temporary control of the region. By 1900 B.C.E., the Amorites, who lived west of the Euphrates, had moved into Mesopotamia and emerged as the region's dominant group. Because they established a capital in the city of Babylon, they are known as the Babylonians. Although the rise of the Babylonian Empire marked the end of Sumerian civilization, the Babylonians adopted key aspects of Sumerian culture. As a result, Sumerian religion and social customs remained powerful influences throughout Mesopotamia for many centuries.

See also: Language and Writing; Mesopotamia; Religion; Technology and Inventions; Tools and Weapons; Ur.

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T

Technology and Inventions

As the site of the world's earliest civilizations, Southwest Asia and the Near East naturally was also the birthplace of many of the most important early developments in technology. Not surprisingly, early Mesopotamian innovations, such as irrigation, metalworking, and the calendar, were tied closely to agricultural production. Many of these early technologies, however, found multiple applications. For example, metalworking techniques that produced tools to plant and harvest crops also made weapons of war. Many of the technologies pioneered in ancient Mesopotamia spread to Europe and significantly influenced later Western civilization.

IRRIGATION

Southwest Asia and the Near East, although home to several major rivers, suffer from an inconsistent and unreliable water supply. Devastating floods and years of drought were common occurrences that forced the early inhabitants of the region to develop ways to exploit the area's water resources efficiently in order to survive. Basic irrigation practices made extensive agriculture—and thus civilization—possible in Mesopotamia around 5400 B.C.E. Irrigation technology first appeared in the Indus River valley about 2600 B.C.E.

Early irrigation systems consisted of canals dug from the rivers and running into the fields. This basic setup was enhanced by the invention of the *shaduf*, a device that made it easier to divert the river's water to the canals. It consists of a frame formed by two upright posts on which a horizontal wooden pole is suspended. The long end of the pole holds a bucket that hangs over the river; the other end holds a counterweight. After the bucket is lowered into the river, the counterweight lifts the water-filled bucket. The pole is then swung around and the water from the bucket is emptied into a canal, from which it flows into the field. Building, repairing, and expanding these irrigation systems required coordination of labor, an important early step toward the evolution of government.

METALWORKING

The invention of metalworking in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) was directly responsible for a significant improvement in the quality and efficiency of tools and weapons in the fourth millennium B.C.E. Copper, which is abundant in Anatolia's mountains, was the first metal used widely to fashion implements. Around 3500 B.C.E., metalsmiths in the nearby Caucasus region (in what is now Georgia and southern Russia) found that combining tin with copper produced a stronger metal **alloy**, bronze. This discovery rapidly spread into Mesopotamia, ushering in the so-called **Bronze Age**.

LINK TO PLACE

Development of Scientific Thinking

Although the ancient inhabitants of Southwest Asia and the Near East demonstrated impressive skills in the fields of mathematics and astronomy, most scholars do not consider these contributions to be "scientific" advances. The modern notion of science implies the existence of theories to explain one's observations. While the Babylonians were able to predict accurately the movement of stars and planets, they had no theory to explain the movements that they observed. Although their calendars indicated reliably when spring would return, the cause of the turning of seasons remained a mystery.

Many scholars trace the roots of scientific thinking in the West to ancient Greece in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. Unlike the Babylonians, the Greeks strongly emphasized the importance of forming theories based on close observation. The fourth-century B.C.E. Greek philosopher Aristotle performed experiments in many natural sciences including astronomy, biology, botany, chemistry, geology, and meteorology, proposing and testing theories to explain his observations. Using this approach, Greek thinkers sought natural explanations for physical phenomena that Mesopotamian cultures attributed to supernatural forces. For example, the Babylonians interpreted disease as punishment inflicted by the gods, while the Greeks argued that disease has a physical basis.

Archeologists have found many copper axe heads in Mesopotamia dating to the fourth millennium B.C.E., indicating that metal rapidly replaced stone for toolmaking soon after humans learned metalworking.

By the third millennium B.C.E., metalsmiths in Southwest Asia and the Near East also had learned to work iron. However, most of the early objects fashioned from iron were ceremonial or decorative, rather than functional. The iron being worked at this time was not being mined as ore, but rather was created as a byproduct of bronze smelting. This made it a rare and therefore expensive commodity, which probably is why it was used so sparingly. The Hittites of northern Anatolia were the first people systematically to mine iron ore to produce functional iron objects such as plows, axes, and weapons, in the fourteenth century B.C.E.

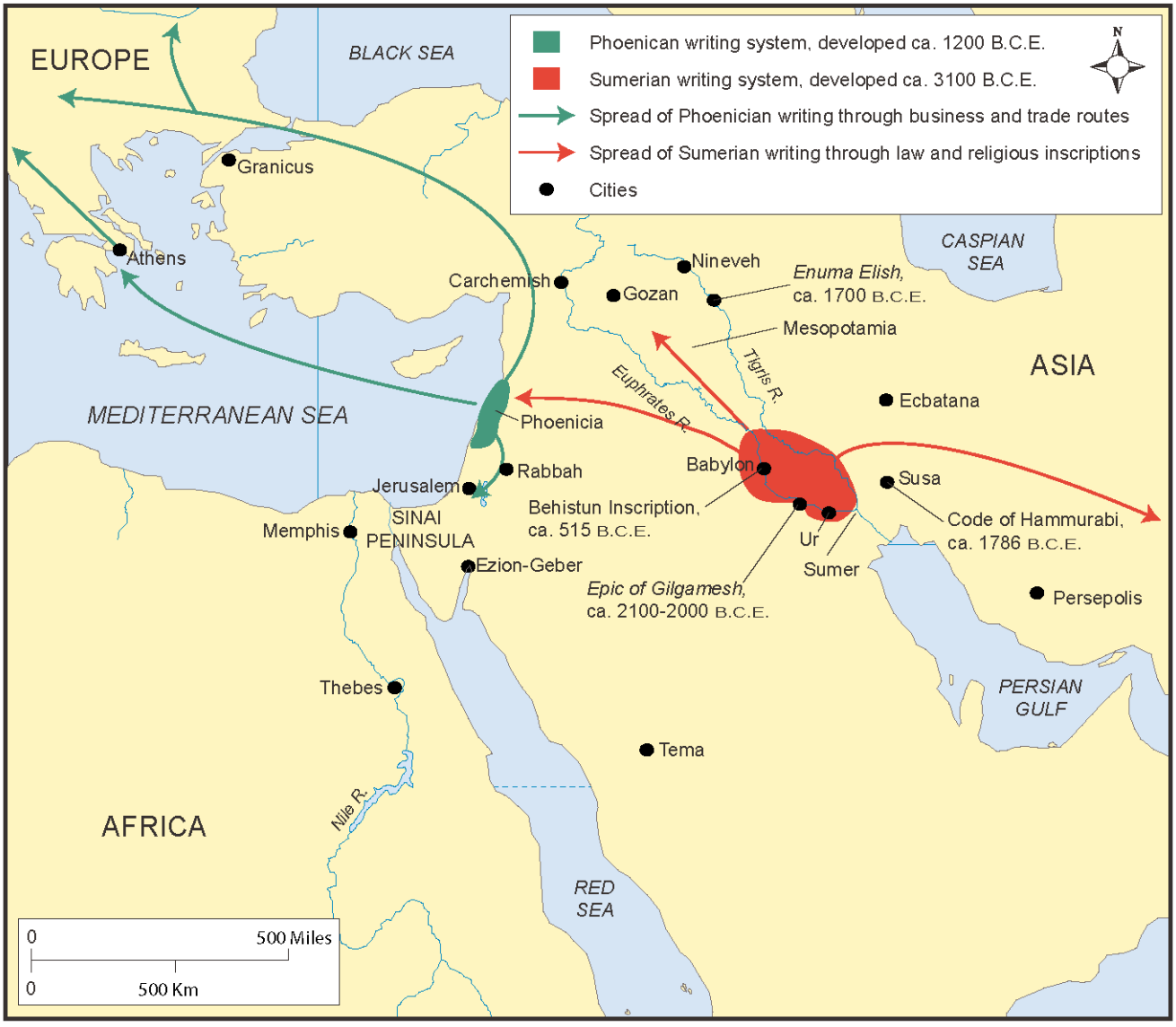
WRITING

The Sumerians invented the first writing system around 3100 B.C.E. The complexity of life in settled civilizations required a method to record business transactions, set down laws, keep tax records, and preserve important religious beliefs and rituals. The first writing system, known as **cuneiform**, consisted of wedge-shaped symbols that represented objects and ideas, not the sounds of speech as in a modern alphabet. The symbols were made by pressing a sharpened reed into a wet clay tablet. The tablet was then laid out in the sun to dry or baked in a kiln. This made the documents permanent, allowing them to survive floods and fires and preventing illegal alterations to the text.

All of the major civilizations of Mesopotamia adopted cuneiform but, with 500 to 1,000 symbols to master, it was cumbersome and difficult to learn. Around 1700 B.C.E., **Semitic**-speaking people in the Sinai Peninsula (an area in modern-day southern Israel) developed a simpler script that consisted of 22 symbols or letters representing speech sounds. The Phoenicians, a people based on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, adapted this script for their own use around 1200 B.C.E. The new alphabet greatly simplified recordkeeping, a significant consideration for a Phoenician society built on trade and commerce. The Phoenicians' alphabet accompanied them on their trading voyages, which helped to popularize and spread the script throughout Southwest Asia, the Near East, and the Mediterranean. Over time, other peoples adopted the Phoenician alphabet, which eventually

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING, CA. 1500 B.C.E.

As ancient societies evolved and became more complex, the practice of writing allowed people to keep accurate records of finances and history, to record the stories and legends of their cultures, and to keep track of their possessions.



replaced cuneiform as the preferred means of written communication.

FERMENTATION

By the fifth millennium B.C.E., Mesopotamians and the residents of the city of Harappa in the Indus River valley independently discovered the ability to ferment grain to produce alcohol, in this case beer. A clay seal dating from about 4000 B.C.E. and used to ensure the privacy of documents, shows Ninkasi, who was apparently the patron goddess, brewing beer. There is also a reference to beer in the Sumerian literary work the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Fermentation was most likely discovered when someone noticed that the composition of grain (probably barley) changed when the grain got wet. Although beer is considered a leisure drink in modern society, its discovery was vitally important for people in ancient Mesopotamia, where the water generally was not safe to drink. Fermented drinks

TECHNOLOGY AND INVENTIONS

CA. 6000 B.C.E. Potter's wheel invented in Mesopotamia

CA. 5400 B.C.E. Irrigation introduced to Mesopotamia

CA. 5400–5000 B.C.E. Date of earliest evidence of winemaking, discovered in Zagros Mountains of modern-day Iran

CA. 3500 B.C.E. Wheel and axle first paired for use on carts

CA. 3100 B.C.E. Sumerians invent world's first writing system, cuneiform, consisting of symbols that represent objects and ideas

CA. 3000–2600 B.C.E. First evidence of mathematical knowledge in Indus River valley

CA. 2600 B.C.E. Irrigation introduced to Indus River valley

CA. 1800–1600 B.C.E. Earliest written evidence of Mesopotamian mathematical knowledge in Mesopotamia

CA. 1200 B.C.E. Phoenicians, a people inhabiting the eastern Mediterranean coast, develop the world's first alphabet

such as beer contained enough alcohol to kill waterborne contaminants and provided a more healthful drink than water.

Mesopotamians also learned how to use fermentation to make wine, first from wild grapes and later from grapes cultivated by farmers. Evidence for winemaking is found in residues at the bottom of ceramic jars excavated in archaeological digs in modern-day Iran's Zagros Mountains that date to 5400–5000 B.C.E. The earliest evidence of winemaking in Mesopotamia comes from the Sumerian city of Uruk and dates to 3500–3100 B.C.E.

PRACTICAL MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

The earliest evidence of mathematical knowledge appeared in the Indus River valley civilization between 3000 and 2600 B.C.E. These people developed fractions and appear to have understood the concept of pi, or the ratio between the diameter of a circle and its circumference. This knowledge proved invaluable for accurately surveying fields and building sites. In fact, the word *geometry* comes from a Greek term meaning "land measurement." Practical mathematics of this type made possible the construction of walled cities and monumental structures such as the Mesopotamian temple complexes called *ziggurats*.

Early Mesopotamian civilizations also applied mathematical principles to the study of the heavens for practical ends. By observing and recording the movements of the sun and moon, the Babylonians developed accurate calendars to mark the planting and harvesting seasons and to time the spring floods. They also developed a numerical system based on the number 60, which facilitated both the recording and analyzing of their observations. The modern division of circles into 360 degrees, and the use of 60-second minutes and 60-minute hours, derives from the Babylonian system.

Cultural contact spread many of the key technologies developed in Southwest Asia and the Near East to Europe. Bronzeworking, for example, which originated in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) in the mid-fourth millennium B.C.E., spread to Crete and Greece during the third millennium. Trading powers such as the Minoan civilization of Crete (ca. 2600–1400 B.C.E.), and the Phoenicians in the first and second millennium B.C.E., brought Mesopotamian technology to the Mediterranean, where it helped form the foundations of the **classical** empires of Greece and Rome.

See also: Agriculture; Babylonia; Culture and Traditions; Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro; Indus

River; Language and Writing; Mesopotamia; Sumer; Tools and Weapons.

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Tigris River

See Fertile Crescent; Mesopotamia.

Tools and Weapons

The rise of civilization in Southwest Asia and the Near East depended in large part on the development of implements that allowed the ancient inhabitants to exploit the region's natural resources. Tools such as the plow and wheel made possible the growth of the world's earliest urban cultures.

As these civilizations grew and prospered, they faced challenges from rivals who coveted the wealth generated by the early Mesopotamian **city-states**. The struggle for resources led to the creation of increasingly effective weapons to replace the stone-tipped spears and crude hand weapons of the **Neolithic era**.

THE WHEEL

The Sumerians are believed to have invented the wheel in the fifth millennium B.C.E. and used it both for transport and for making pottery. Potters used the wheel as a platform on which to form lumps of clay into various types of storage vessels. Prior to the invention of the wheel, pots were made by coiling strips of wet clay and placing them atop one another. This limited the size and shapes of pots that could be produced. The potter's wheel allowed **artisans** to work with larger lumps of clay, rotating them on the wheel and shaping them with both hands. As a result, potters were able to make larger pots in a variety of shapes and sizes.

As the usefulness of the wheel became apparent, the Sumerians found additional applications for it. By 3500 B.C.E., the wheel and axle combination, which led to the first wheeled vehicles, had been developed. The combination of wheel and axle significantly changed the nature of trade and warfare. Wheeled carts freed humans from the need to carry goods on their own backs and those of animals. This allowed the movement of more goods over greater distances in a shorter time, greatly enhancing trade in the region and with other areas. The wheel also made possible the invention of the chariot, used first to transport troops to war and later as a battlefield weapon in its own right.

THE PLOW

The development of tools in the region was driven initially by the need to produce more food. This led to the invention of increasingly better plows by Mesopotamian farmers.

The earliest farmers in the region probably used nothing more sophisticated than a stick to scratch rows in the thin soil, in which they then placed seeds. The need to improve on these crude methods led first to the invention of a simple hoe, with a single blade to create wider rows and to chop at the weeds that also grew in the fields. Neither of these

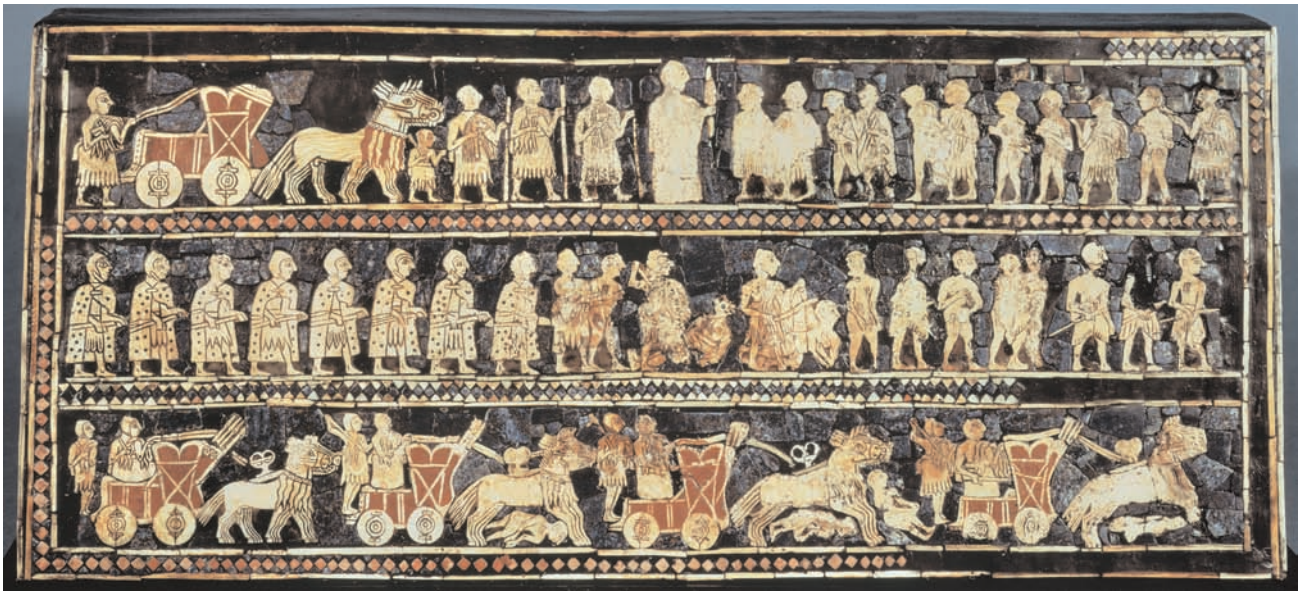
This stone model of an Amorite chariot was sculpted between 2000 and 1595 B.C.E. The first chariots were used to carry troops to battle and were not seen as fighting vehicles. By the seventeenth century B.C.E., the Hittites of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) had developed lighter and faster chariots for use in battle. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

methods was particularly effective in making the most of the area's agricultural potential.

Mesopotamian farmers invented the plow in the sixth millennium B.C.E., probably shortly after they first domesticated oxen. Oxen harnessed to the plow tilled the soil much more effectively than did individual farmers with hoes. The original plows were fairly simple, consisting of a frame with a downward pointed stick. These so-called scratch-plows broke the soil and moved it to both sides, but this action did not mix nutrients back into the soil. By 4000 B.C.E., farmers had invented a plow with a curved blade that turned the soil over, allowing them to mix the top layer of soil back into the earth. Overturning the soil mixed the nutrients it contained back into the fields, making them better able to support crops.

WAR AND WEAPONS

Most early warriors in ancient Southwest Asia and the Near East used the bow and spear, weapons that had been in existence for thousands of years. As city-states grew, they formed organized citizen armies, whose soldiers often used farm implements such as sickles, axes, and hoes as weapons. The spread of metalworking in the late fourth millennium B.C.E. led to the development of a new weapon—the sword. By the third millennium B.C.E., bronze swords and bronze-tipped spears were the typical weapons of Mesopotamian warriors.



The Royal Standard of Ur, dating to about 2750 B.C.E., is a mosaic depicting aspects of society in ancient Sumer. The standard, unearthed from royal graves in the southern Mesopotamian city of Ur, contains rows of figures on both sides. One side (shown here) contains images of war while the other (not pictured) features images of peacetime. (The Bridgeman Art Library/Getty Images)

An elaborate, carved box called the Standard of Ur, discovered during **excavation** of the Sumerian city of that name, depicts soldiers equipped with an impressive array of battle gear. Warriors wore copper helmets with a leather cap or lining underneath. The helmets, which fit close to the skull, were probably strong enough to resist a blow from a war mace, or heavy club. Soldiers also wore ankle-long

LINK TO PLACE

Standard of Ur

During a 1920s **excavation** at the ancient city of Ur, famed English **archeologist** Sir Leonard Woolley discovered a beautifully decorated box dated to 2600 B.C.E. This box has been named the Standard of Ur. It was part of the funereal goods found in a tomb located in the Royal Cemetery.

The box is called a standard because scholars believe it was carried on a pole accompanying the man with whom it was buried to show his office and importance. The standard is made of a variety of materials including white shells, red limestone, and lapis lazuli, which is a stone of a vibrant blue color.

One side of the Standard focuses on war and the other side on peace. The war panel shows the king of Ur, his nobles, priests, and soldiers preparing for war. The peace panel shows the same figures sitting at a banquet table, perhaps celebrating a victory in war. There are musicians playing lyres, small stringed instruments similar to harps, and servants bringing in a variety of animals. It is unclear if these animals are destined to be dinner or are part of the spoils won by the king in battle.

In addition to the intrinsic beauty and fine craftsmanship apparent in the piece, the Standard of Ur provides a glimpse of the appearance of the Sumerian people. The figures depict men with shaved heads and no facial hair. Civilians wore cloths wrapped around their waists, with warriors adding cloaks over their shoulders that were clasped together at the neck and fell to the ankles. The soldiers wear tight-fitting caps to protect their heads and carried short swords, spears, and shields.

ANCIENT WEAPONS

The Scythed Chariot

The chariot, although used widely in ancient Southwest Asia, had several limitations as a weapon of war. It was difficult to get horses to charge into tight infantry formations such as the phalanx employed by the Greeks and Macedonians. Chariots were offensive weapons best suited for combat in flat, open terrain that offered room to maneuver. The goal of a chariot attack was to smash into the enemy formation, inflicting casualties and sowing panic and disorder in the defender's ranks. However, a disciplined army could open gaps in its formation and allow chariots to pass through without causing a great deal of harm.

The scythed chariot was designed to offset several of these drawbacks. It consisted of a chariot with one or more blades mounted on each end of its axle. The blades extended about three feet (1 m) on each side of the chariot and were fixed pointing forward. This made it extremely difficult for troops to move quickly out of the chariot's path, for the blades allowed it to cut a much wider path of destruction. The Persians employed scythed chariots with some success, as did many of the warriors of the **Hellenistic** kingdoms ruled by the successors of Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E). The last recorded use of scythed chariots was by troops under King Mithridates VI of Pontus (a kingdom in what is now Turkey) against Roman forces at the battle of Zela in 47 B.C.E.

leather cloaks with circles of metal sewn onto the outside. These metal plates were meant to deflect sword blows and spears. Other weapons depicted include short swords and javelins.

The invention of the wheel also transformed the way war was fought in ancient Southwest Asia and the Near East. The Sumerians used the wheel to create the first chariots, one of which is depicted in the Standard of Ur. Mesopotamian chariots had four wheels and were pulled by mules. These chariots were not used in battle, but rather to transport troops. The Hittites improved on the Mesopotamian design around 1800 B.C.E., creating a vehicle with lighter wheels that carried a driver and two soldiers.

Survival in ancient Southwest Asia and the Near East depended on growing enough food for the population and protecting the possessions and wealth that the king and his subjects amassed. The development of improved agricultural tools and weapons of war served these ends and advanced humankind's store of general knowledge.

See also: Anatolia; Archeological Discoveries; Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro; Hittites; Mesopotamia; Scythians; Sumer; Technology and Inventions.

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Ur

Ancient Sumerian capital and earliest of the major Sumerian **city-states**. Also the biblical home of Abraham, Ur was founded on the lower Euphrates River around 3000 B.C.E. in what is now southern Iraq. Archeological **excavations** at Ur have unearthed monumental buildings, royal tombs, tablets containing **cuneiform inscriptions**, and outstanding examples of Sumerian craftsmanship and decoration.

Early irrigation systems in lower Mesopotamia supported widespread agricultural production and led to a significant increase in population by the fourth millennium B.C.E. This in turn facilitated the rise of large urban settlements such as Ur. **Archeologists** estimate that, by about 2030 B.C.E., Ur had a population of 65,000 and may well have been the largest city of its day. Its warrior-king was the leader of a centralized government that ruled over a **hierarchical** society.

The power and organizational abilities of the government were exemplified by the Great Ziggurat built in the city by King Shulgi (r. 2047–1999 B.C.E.) and which is still standing. At the top of the *ziggurat*, a massive building consisting of a series of levels, stood a temple dedicated to Nanna, the moon god and patron deity of Ur. The ziggurat measured approximately 210 feet (64 m) by 150 feet (46 m) and stood 65 feet (20 m) high.

This and similar building projects were paid for in part by the proceeds from Ur's extensive trade in the Persian Gulf and other Sumerian city-states. Using the harbor at Dilmun, in modern-day Bahrain, the merchants of Ur carried on extensive trade as far away as the Indus River valley cities in what are now India and Pakistan.

Around 2330 B.C.E., Sumer was invaded by the Akkadians of northern Mesopotamia, who captured Ur and incorporated it into their empire. Over the next 1800 years, the city was conquered and reconquered by a number of civilizations, including those of the Elamites and Babylonians. However, the city continued to prosper, because of its strategic location on the trans-Mesopotamian trade routes. By the sixth century B.C.E., the waters of the Persian Gulf retreated, silting up the harbor and leaving Ur landlocked. Without immediate access to the Gulf, Ur's merchants were no longer able to participate in the sea trade with the Indus River valley population. A severe drought that hit the area at around the same time led to large-scale exodus from Ur. By 500 B.C.E., the city was abandoned.

See also: Archeological Discoveries; Babylonia; Sumer.

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Ziggurat

See Art and Architecture; Religion.

Zoroastrianism

Monotheistic religion of ancient Persia, whose teachings are summed up in the phrase "good thoughts, good words, good deeds." During the Persian Empire (648–330 B.C.E.), Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion in ancient Southwest Asia, and its ideas may have influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Zoroastrianism continues to be practiced today, although with fewer adherents than in **antiquity**.

Scholars have long debated whether Zoroastrianism is truly monotheistic, since its god has two equally powerful aspects and is supported by a secondary group of divine powers. The single god of Zoroastrianism is called Ahura Mazda, creator of the world and all good things. Ahura Mazda is divided into twin spirits: Spenta Mainyu, the good and life-giving spirit, and Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, the evil spirit. There are also six spirits who assist Spenta Mainyu. Each of these so-called Amesha Spentas represents an aspect of goodness and virtue, including desirable power, wholeness, piety, morality, good thought, and justice. Spenta Mainyu and the six spirits are in a permanent battle with six evil spirits and Angra Mainyu. This eternal battle between good and evil is at the heart of Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrianism rejects the concept of predestination, the idea that one's fate is determined by a divine power. Instead, it teaches that people are born with free will, and that each person is responsible for his or her own actions, and for choosing to reject evil and to act for the good. After death, individuals are judged on the merit of their thoughts, words, and deeds. Those who have lived good lives join Ahura Mazda in heaven; those who have not spend time in hell.

The religion was first taught by a prophet named Zarathustra (or Zoroaster), a mysterious figure said to have lived some time between the eighteenth and sixth centuries B.C.E., possibly somewhere in the northeastern area of ancient Persia. Zarathustra claimed that the revelations for the faith came from Ahura Mazda. They were recorded as poems called *Gathas* in an ancient Persian dialect. Worship focuses on prayers usually chanted before an altar with a sacred fire burning. This represents the positive force of Ahura Mazda.

Zoroastrianism includes ideas present in the later faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which are known as Abrahamic faiths, tracing their origins back to the biblical figure Abraham. Chief among the concepts found in Zoroastrianism and later in the other religions are heaven, hell, last judgment, purgatory, angels, evil spirits, and the coming of a messiah, or messenger. The meaning of each of these concepts is similar in all four faiths, with the exception of hell. Rather than a place where the damned are sent for eternity as believed in Christianity, hell in Zoroastrianism is a temporary place where evildoers are held after death until good triumphs in the world. At that point, they undergo a purification process, after which they join Ahura Mazda.

See also: Christianity; Islam; Jews and Judaism; Persia; Religion.

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Glossary

The following words and terms, including those in "The Historian's Tools," also appear in context in boldface type throughout this volume.

The Historian's Tools

These terms and concepts are commonly used or referred to by historians and other researchers and writers to analyze the past.

cause-and-effect relationship A paradigm for understanding historical events where one result or condition is the direct consequence of a preceding event or condition

chronological thinking Developing a clear sense of historical time—past, present, and future

cultural history See history, cultural

economic history See history, economic

era A period of time usually marked by a characteristic circumstance or event

historical inquiry A methodical approach to historical understanding that involves asking a question, gathering information, exploring hypotheses, and establishing conclusions

historical interpretation and analysis An approach to studying history that involves applying a set of questions to a set of data in order to understand how things change over time

historical research An investigation into an era or event using primary sources (records made during the period in question) and secondary sources (information gathered after the period in question)

historical understanding Knowledge of a moment, person, event, or pattern in history that links that information to a larger context

history, cultural An analysis of history in terms of a people's culture, or way of life, including investigating patterns of human work and thought

history, economic An analysis of history in terms of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods

history, political An analysis of history in terms of the methods used to govern a group of people

history, social An analysis of history in terms of the personal relationships between people and groups

history of science and technology Study of the evolution of scientific discoveries and technological advancements

patterns of continuity and change A paradigm for understanding historical events in terms of institutions, culture, or other social behavior that either remain constant or show marked differences over time

periodization Dividing history into distinct eras

political history See history, political

radiocarbon dating A test for determining the approximate age of an object or artifact by measuring the number of carbon-14 atoms in that object

social history See history, social

Key Terms Found in A to Z Entries

alloy Substance that is a mixture of two or more metals

animism General belief that everything possesses a soul or a spirit

antiquity The ancient past, particularly referring to the history of the Western world before the fall of the Roman Empire in C.E. 476

archeologist A scientist who studies prehistoric people and their culture

aristocratic In a society, belonging to the nobility or the ruling class, whose wealth is generally based on land and whose power is passed on from one generation to another

artifact In archeology, any material object made by humans, especially a tool, weapon, or ornament; archeologists study artifacts of ancient cultures to try to learn more about them

artisan A skilled craftsperson or worker who practices a trade or handicraft

barter To trade one item for another of equal value

Bronze Age Historical period marked by introduction of bronze for tools and weapons

city-state A city and the area immediately around it

classical Term applied to the culture that flourished between 480 and 323 B.C.E. in Greece

cuneiform Earliest writing system of ancient Mesopotamia consisting of symbols representing objects and ideas

diaspora Forced dispersal of a group of people from their homeland to other places generally as a form of punishment meant to destroy that people's unique culture, religion, or political beliefs

doctrine A set of principles presented for acceptance or belief, such as by a religious, political, or philosophical group

egalitarian Characterized by social equality

equinox Literally "equal night"; an astronomical term referring to the two days each year in which daylight and darkness are approximately equal; usually March 21 (spring equinox) and September 21 (autumnal equinox)

excavation Literally "digging"; the primary technique used by archeologists to uncover evidence of prehistoric life

Hellenistic Describing Greek culture from the time of Alexander III, the Great (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), to approximately the first century B.C.E., when the Greek language and ideas were carried to the non-Greek world

hierarchical Describing an organization, especially of persons, that ranks people by authority or importance; societies that are hierarchical have distinct social classes, some of which are considered superior to others

hieroglyph A pictorial symbol used to express a word, syllable, or sound

Ice Age An extended period of extremely low temperatures; there have been many ice ages in the history of the earth

inscription Writing carved or engraved on a surface such as a coin, tablet, or stone monument

Iron Age Historical period, following the Bronze Age, and marked by introduction of ironworking technology

linguist A person who studies human speech, especially languages and the means of communication

Mesolithic Period Era also known as the Middle Stone Age, characterized by the adoption of the bow and flint tools and ending with the introduction of agriculture

monotheism Belief in a single deity

Neolithic Period Also known as the New Stone Age, an interval in human culture from about 10,000 to 3000 B.C.E., starting with the introduction of agriculture and ending with the introduction of the first metal implements and weapons

Neolithic Revolution Period in the Near East and Southwest Asia from about 8000 to 6000 B.C.E. during which the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture occurred

Paleolithic Period Also called the "Old Stone" Age, from the Greek; the period in human development from about 450,000 to 10,000 B.C.E., beginning with the use of the earliest stone tools and ending with the adoption of the bow and flint tools; historians further classify the era as the Lower Paleolithic Period (about 450,000 to 100,000 B.C.E.), Middle Paleolithic Period (100,000 to 40,000 B.C.E.), and Upper Paleolithic Period (40,000 to 10,000 B.C.E.)

pantheon All the gods of a particular people, or, a temple dedicated to all the gods of a particular people

pastoral Characterized by a rural life, peaceful, simply, and natural

patriarchal A type of society ruled by male leaders, where men typically possess sole religious, political, and domestic authority

pictograph A pictorial representation of a word or idea

polytheism Worship of a number of deities, often representations of natural forces, such as the rain or the wind

relief A type of sculpture in which partially raised figures project from a flat background, giving the appearance of dimension

secular Related to worldly things, as opposed to religion and church

Semitic Person of Hebrew, Arabic, Assyrian or Phoenician decent

stratification Division into different levels or orders based on rank

textiles Items made of cloth or fabric, or the fibers used to weave a fabric

tribute Payment from one nation or group to another as a sign of respect or to acknowledge submission

vassal A person who owes loyalty or service to a more powerful individual in a social system or context

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